Passion and resistance
Grassroots youth work in a changing policy context

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Abstract

This thesis explores the everyday experience of part-time and volunteer youth workers in England who work in open access youth clubs and on the streets. Unlike their managers who are increasingly confined to offices and meetings, they spend most of their time directly working with young people; yet they are often excluded or distanced from decisions about their work, and their voices are rarely heard in policy making. My research takes an activist scholarship approach, employing in-depth interviews, discussion groups, practitioner ethnography (participant observation in my workplace) and policy analysis to explore how grassroots youth workers in England experience their role in a changing policy context.

The study paints a picture of passionate and committed practitioners who care about the young people they work with. However, their practice is constrained and transformed by spending cuts, marketisation, performative target cultures and surveillance. Current youth policy is underpinned by a set of ideologies that draw on discourses of the market in the guise of entrepreneurialism. This context restricts the most informal and associational forms of youth work practice, encouraging individualistic and short-term versions that are able to 'prove' their monetary value.

Although most of their workplaces are organised around targets and profit and their labour is often exploited, grassroots youth workers do not emerge from this study as powerless dupes. The workers who took part in the study have varied perspectives and yet all are thoughtful and critical in relation to target cultures, market approaches and surveillance. They use various means to negotiate, challenge and resist the situations that they find themselves in, engaging in counter-discourses and creating spaces for alternative practice. The thesis concludes that open access youth work is under threat and yet is surviving as a passionate, principled and reflective practice that values equality, freedom and collective life.

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List of acronyms

CYWU	Community and Youth Workers Union (now part of Unite)
JNC	Joint Negotiating Committee (a body that oversees the framework for grading youth work jobs and accrediting professional youth work courses in England and Wales)
IDYW	In Defence of Youth Work
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans
NCS	National Citizen Service
REYS	Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (see DfES, 2002)
VOY	Voice of Youth

Chapter 1
Introduction

> I've been doing voluntary youth work since October and it's at the local youth club […] I'm there four times a week at the minute, so I don't *have* to be there that often but I *love* it [...] I *literally* spend the evening going from group to group chatting to people, anything they want to talk about. If I see people on the computer I'll go, 'How's your day been, how's everything going?' They come to me, they chat to me. […] I think the face to face time is what keeps you real, it's what keeps you wanting to do it. (Navaeh, volunteer youth worker)

> It's the changing nature of youth work over the last ten years, we've seen a massive change. And it's all targeted work, now. It's all, I mean, I just remember a young person not long ago in club just saying to me, 'I feel like I'm in class again'. And it struck a chord with me because I knew exactly what he was on about. Because we were trying to get him to engage in stuff that they'd probably be doing in school. […] We need to get back to grassroots. (Leo, part-time youth worker)

These quotations from youth workers who took part in this study are placed here at the beginning of the thesis to signal the interrelated threads of passion and resistance that run throughout, as well as to emphasise the centrality of practitioners' views and perspectives. Part-time and volunteer youth workers emerge from this research as highly committed to their work, and yet they tend to feel alienated from its money-oriented and target-driven aspects. They are often excluded from decisions that affect their role, and their voices are rarely heard in wider policy. Through in-depth interviews, discussion groups, and participant observation in my own youth work organisation, this research explores how youth work in England is experienced by its least senior practitioners at a time when their roles are particularly precarious – and how they resist in their everyday working lives.

This study takes place in England, where the current policy context has created a climate of extreme insecurity for youth work.[1] Public spending cuts have disproportionately affected local authority youth services: budgets have fallen by a third on average in the last two years and up to more than 75% in some areas (Barton &

[1] The study focuses on England because there are significant differences in policy as it affects youth work in Scotland, Northern Ireland and (to a lesser extent) Wales. However, some of the broad directions of policy – as well as aspects of how practitioners experience policy – may well be similar for youth workers in these jurisdictions, as well as in other places where youth work exists.

Edgington, 2014), 2000 youth work jobs have been lost (Unison, 2014b, p.5), and some local authorities now have no youth service at all (Cabinet Office, 2014). The cuts have been detrimental to open access youth work in particular, intensifying a longer term trend towards the formalisation of youth work and the marginalisation of community based approaches in favour of intervention projects which can 'prove' specific outcomes. Those youth services that remain beyond the cuts tend to focus their much reduced budgets on targeted and structured forms of youth support (Cabinet Office, 2014). In this context, youth clubs and other open access projects - often working predominantly with black and working-class young people - are at particular risk of closure (Pidd, 2013; Unison, 2014b).

The particular concern of this study is *grassroots* youth work, a term I use in two senses. First, grassroots has connotations of particular *approaches* to youth work that are locally based, person-centred and informal. These forms of youth work are primarily open access and take place in community settings, youth clubs and on the streets. Second, grassroots suggests a certain kind of *worker*, one who works directly with young people rather than in an administrative or managerial role, and who may often come from a similar background to the young people who take part. The research focuses on part-time and volunteer youth workers because they tend to be grassroots workers in both these senses. Although it is possible to be a full-time face-to-face worker or a part-time senior manager, these combinations remain relatively rare.

In this introductory chapter I will briefly outline the field of youth work practice and research – first in general, and then in relation to part-time and volunteer youth workers in particular. I then give an overview of the policy context that will be explored in greater detail in later chapters, a context that is specifically English and yet has echoes in many other countries where youth work takes place. I follow this by introducing the interrelated themes at the centre of this study: policy, resistance and passion. Lastly, I outline the thesis chapters and my aims for the research.

Introducing youth work

> Youth and community work is about dialogue, about conversation. What do youth and community workers do? Listen and talk. Make relationships. Enable young people to come to voice. 'Conversation' conveys a sense of the mutual learning which the practice at its best enables. The roles of educator and learner are each present in informal education. (Batsleer, 2008, p.5)

I have been a youth worker on a voluntary and paid basis for over twenty years and yet I still hesitate when people ask me what youth work is. It is well established that youth work practice is somewhat difficult to define, and there is a rich vein of literature debating definitions and possible boundaries (Davies, 2005; 2010; Ord, 2009; IDYW, 2011). It is sometimes easier to list what youth work is *not* (schooling, social work, probation, careers guidance, policing) than to explain what it *is*. I very much like Janet Batsleer's definition, above; however, when I give that kind of answer outside of a youth work setting I am often met with puzzlement. Perhaps people wonder how it is possible to get paid for conversation and why anybody would want to fund such a thing.

While I am interested in the boundaries of youth work and indeed in whether it is useful to delineate its boundaries at all (see McGimpsey, 2013), for the purposes of this thesis I take a reasonably flexible approach, defining youth work broadly as any work with young people that has the following distinctive features:

- Young people are involved on a voluntary basis rather than being compelled to attend;
- There is an element of informal education, of learning through conversation, relationships and activity; and,
- Young people's views and wishes are central to the process.

This interpretation is based on my experience in several youth work settings over many years as well as on a range of literature from the UK and beyond (Davies, 2005; 2010; Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Crimmens et al, 2004; Khan, 2013; Spence & Devanney, 2006; Sapin, 2009; Davies & Batsleer, 2010; IDYW, 2011; Young, 2006; Coussée & Williamson, 2011; Sercombe, 2010; Tiffany, 2007).[2] This literature also

2 The term 'youth worker' is mainly used in the UK, Australia and Northern Europe; elsewhere, there are similar occupations that use different names and have different emphases (for example, animateur in France; social pedagogue in Germany; youth development worker in the USA).

emphasises, variously: anti-oppressive or anti-discriminatory practice; critical dialogue and conversation; process over product; working in and creating young people's own spaces; the importance of group and peer work; involving young people in democratic and participative practices; experiential and social learning; working with young people from their own starting points rather than from the labels given to them by others, or from what others think they need; the centrality of the relationship between youth workers and young people; and the importance of critically reflective practice. These interpretations seem to serve as exhortation (what youth work '*should'* be) as much as description (what youth work actually '*is'*). To some extent they represent a break and a development from the early roots of youth work in the late nineteenth century in England and beyond, where this work was underpinned by the ideologies of empire and Christian faith, often aiming to rescue and moralise the growing urban working-class youth (Davies, 1999a; Kahn, 2013). Contemporary formulations of youth work build on this history, as well as on early writing on informal education (Brew, 1957; Montagu, 1941), on radical and experimental social and play work (Bazely, 1969; Paneth, 1944) and on the influential Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education, 1960). This report heralded an expansion of local authority funded youth work in England and Wales, and emphasised the importance of what is known in the field as the 'voluntary principle':

> Voluntary attendance is important because it introduces adult freedom and choice. Compulsory attendance is a feature of school and will be of the county college, but in contrast to some Youth Service experiments in totalitarian countries, young people here go to a club of their own free will. They are free to take part or not in its activities, and to leave if the activities fail to hold their interest. Their freedom of choice matches their independence and their growing maturity. (Ministry of Education, 1960, p.10)

The voluntary principle, then, has its roots in the invention of youth as a social category between childhood and adulthood (Savage, 2008), as well as in the post-war context where it was seen as vital to contrast English youth work with compulsory coercive youth movements in other countries. In recent years this principle has been eroded as a growing number of youth workers are employed in settings where young people are compelled to attend, such as schools and youth offending teams (Davies, 2005; IDYW, 2009; 2011). Some commentators argue that youth work in such settings is not problematic as long as the relationship between worker and young person remains negotiated (Ord, 2009; Coburn, 2012), while others draw a clear 'line in the sand',

arguing that work with young people in compulsory settings may be necessary but should not be defined as youth work (Davies, 2005; 2010; IDYW, 2009; 2011). Recent government policy documents have tended to sidestep such debates in the field by avoiding the term 'youth work' with its professional connotations and controversies, instead referring more generically to 'positive activities for young people' and 'services for young people' (H.M. Treasury & DCSF, 2007; House of Commons Education Committee, 2011a).

I want to finish this section with a brief note on youth work research in the UK.[3] In recent years there has been an expansion of youth work publications, most of which are textbooks aimed at undergraduate students, with relatively few being based on substantial empirical research. This can partly be explained by youth and community work's small resource base and relatively low status in university departments, where lecturers tend to have heavy teaching loads and limited time for research (Jeffs & Spence, 2008). There is said to be a 'lingering anti-intellectualism' in the field (Spence & Wood, 2011, p.2), perhaps a legacy of limited academic experience and confidence amongst practitioners. As a result, youth work is somewhat under-researched and under-theorised in comparison to related fields (Coburn, 2012). This is illustrated, for example, by a search of the 35,000 doctoral theses on the British Library's Ethos database: there are only 29 returns for the key phrase "youth work", compared to 14,483 for schools, 3,808 for teaching, 353 for "social work", 198 for "adult education", and 66 for "community work".[4] This may change in future as there are currently a relatively high number of students studying youth work related subjects at doctoral level.

The field of youth work research has significant strengths despite its small size. Youth work theory and research is discussed and disseminated in the journal Youth and Policy, which also coordinates a series of academic conferences. More recently there have been regular seminars and conferences associated with the Youth Studies Special Interest Group of the British Education Research Association. Such networks encourage vibrant, friendly and encouraging exchanges of practice, theory, politics and research.

[3] Although youth work policy differs between the jurisdictions making up the UK, the youth work research community referred to here is UK-wide (albeit overly Anglo-centric at times). There is also collaboration and crossover with youth work (and related) research in other parts of the world, most often in the rest of Europe, North America and Australia.

[4] Keyword searches conducted on 30/05/14 at http://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do

Part-timers and volunteers: Working at the grassroots

This study explores the everyday working experiences of grassroots youth workers with a particular focus on part-timers, both paid and unpaid. I have a personal interest in this group because the large majority of my time as a youth worker has been spent as a volunteer and/or paid part-timer. In research terms, part-timers are in an interesting position as they tend to spend most of their time working directly with young people and yet have relatively low status in their organisations. They make up a large majority of youth workers in England: according to data gathered by the Children's Workforce Development Council in 2010, two thirds of paid local authority youth workers were employed part-time, and volunteers numbered over half a million, making up nearly nine tenths of youth workers in all sectors (Mellor & McDonnell, 2010, p.111 & p.8).[5] According to the same data, part-timers are more likely than their full-time and senior colleagues to be women and/or from minority backgrounds (Mellor & McDonnell, 2010).

There is a relative lack of literature that focuses on how part-time and volunteer youth workers experience their role, other than some interesting personal reflections (e.g. Davies, 1976). There is more literature on part-time youth workers' training, although the most substantial studies in this category are now more than thirty years old and took place under very different conditions (Butters & Newell, 1978; Bolger & Scott, 1984). I will now review the available research and policy literature on part-time youth workers to provide a context for my study, first discussing the status and role of part-timers, then exploring the literature relating to their training, finishing with a brief discussion of the context of their work today.

The status and role of part-time youth workers

In the early days of youth work there was little need for the 'part-time' designation because nearly all youth workers were volunteers who combined youth work with other work, religious or family commitments (Davies, 1999a). This began to change during the Second World War when the government required local authorities in England and

[5] These figures may well have changed due to substantial cuts in staffing since 2010.

Wales to coordinate youth activity, provide support and funding for voluntary organisations, and contribute towards the salaries of full-time leaders (Board of Education, 1939). It is around this time that a distinction began to be drawn between full-time youth leaders and their part-time helpers (Roberts, 2004).

This distinction became more explicit with the publication of the Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education, 1960), a seminal policy document that led to the significant expansion of state-funded youth work in England and Wales, and a doubling in the number of full-timers (Smith, 1996). The Albemarle Report resulted in the development of two separate training routes for youth workers: a professional course at the newly opened National College for the Training of Youth Leaders, and a localised part-time training route for volunteers. This differentiation of training seems to have embedded a distinction in status between part-timers and full-timers that persists today. With some individual and organisational variations, full-time youth workers are generally required to have professional youth work qualifications and are employed as managers of staff, projects and buildings, while part-timers usually assist the full-timers and have a lower level of training. Thus being a 'part-timer' in youth work does not merely designate that fewer hours are worked; it also suggests that the worker has relatively low status in their organisation and concentrates on face-to-face work rather than managerial activities.

In the real world, of course, there are many variations in these norms: for example, two of the part-time workers I interviewed coordinate small youth organisations; one is employed as a 'significant part-timer' with a relatively high level of responsibility; three are professionally qualified at degree or masters level; and one works more than fifty hours each week despite being paid for only seventeen. Despite these variations, the following paradox rings true even thirty years after it was written in relation to the status of part-time youth workers:

> Part-time youth workers, paid or unpaid, occupy a contradictory position. They work face to face with young people and so are at the centre of what goes on: but they are more often than not at the periphery when it comes to many of the decisions and discussions that affect their work. (Bolger & Scott, 1984, p.7)

In the early days of professional youth work it might have been assumed that part-time workers who helped out at evening youth club sessions also had ‘day jobs’; however, a 1982 trade union survey dispelled this myth with the finding that most part-timers

(particularly women) relied on youth work for their main source of income. This evidence created an impetus to improve the pay and conditions of part-timers, who had not previously been included in the union-negotiated JNC pay scale (Davies, 1999b). In 1985 a part-time workers' caucus was formed in the Community and Youth Workers Union, and a part-timers' conference organised (Nicholls, 2009). The union campaigned for the harmonisation of full-timers' and part-timers' terms and conditions, and pro-rata equivalent pay was eventually agreed in 1996 (Davies, 1999b; Nicholls, 2012). This was presented by the union as a significant victory and may well have improved conditions for some part-timers – although probably not all.[6] It remains the case that part-timers are more likely to be on the lowest grades in the pay scale because they tend to be employed in the least senior positions.

The pay and conditions of part-timers today is difficult to assess because of a steep erosion of JNC terms and conditions and an increase in casual employment, self-employed terms, employment agency arrangements and zero hour contracts (Walker, 2014; False Economy, 2013). It may be speculated that the precarious nature of employment in the youth sector is likely to affect part-timers more than their full-time and managerial colleagues. Of course, the largest numbers of part-time youth workers have always been and remain volunteers and hence are not paid at all.

Part-time worker training

The great majority of policy and research literature on part-time and volunteer youth workers in England focuses on their training (Ministry of Education, 1962; DES, 1966; Davies, 1971; Callan Anderson, 1975; Butters & Newell, 1978; Bolger and Cattermole, 1981; Harper, 1983; Bolger & Scott, 1984; Wiggans, 1984; John & Parkes, 1984; P. Taylor, 1984; Lacey & Sprent, 1984; Kendra, 1985; DES, 1992; Norton et al, 1994; Ofsted, 1998). Most of this literature comes from the period between the Albemarle Report's recommendations for part-timer training in 1960 and the introduction of competency-based qualifying courses in 2001, and much is written by government

6 When I presented some of this material at the Youth and Policy 'History of Community and Youth Work' conference in March 2013, somebody who had been a part-timer at the time of pay harmonisation told me that formal pay parity was sometimes detrimental to part-timers. This is because many had previously been on higher hourly rates than their full-time colleagues (like part-time adult educators or lecturers, these higher hourly rates had been granted in recognition of time spent on planning and preparation).

departments or commissioned by official bodies. The breadth and depth of this training-related literature (in comparison to the paucity of research on part-timers' actual working experiences) signals the importance attributed to training by policy makers of the time, who saw it as a vital route to improving the quality of youth work.

Following Albemarle, the Ministry of Education's (1962) Bessey Report recommended that local authorities provide in-depth training for part-timers. In the early years of the youth service there was a strong emphasis on encouraging part-timers to think about their motivations and gain further training. This is a worthwhile and understandable aim, although it was sometimes expressed in terms that might seem rather condescending today. In a booklet for club leaders, Dainow (1965) suggests that some youth workers are 'Peter Pan' characters who are not ready to grow up, others become youth workers to gain power or superiority over others, while some simply never got around to leaving the youth club once they became too old to attend. A booklet entitled *So you want to help in a youth club?* echoes this critical discussion of motivation, and suggests that 'Vastly more could be done, if the adults tried to reduce the degree to which they satisfied their own needs, and took the needs of young people as their principal reference point' (Bunt, 1972, p.15). These implied criticisms of youth work volunteers suggest that they were perceived as self-interested and perhaps immature. Perhaps there was an element of truth here, but given that many of these volunteers will have recently been youth club members themselves, while others were local people 'helping out' in their spare time, there seems to be something of a deficit model operating here.

However accurate (or not) the perceptions of poor quality youth work staff might have been, training was widely seen as the solution. Within a few years of the Albemarle and Bessey Reports, most local authorities in England and Wales were running introductory youth work training courses in which 5000 part-timers and volunteers enrolled each year (DES, 1966). These were substantial courses that typically took place one evening per week over two terms with additional residential weekends, and were often funded by the local authority or employers and provided free to the trainees. They varied from lecture-style courses to participatory approaches that encouraged the development of self-awareness, group work and reflective practice (DES, 1966).

By the late 1970s concerns had developed over the uneven quality of training provision across the country, and reviews were commissioned to investigate the situation. These reviews, *Realities of Training* (Butters & Newell, 1978) and *Starting from Strengths* (Bolger & Scott, 1984) were based on substantial qualitative research and provide valuable insight into the working experiences of part-time youth workers at the time. Butters and Newell's (1978) *Realities of Training* was funded by the Department of Education and Science to address a lack of information about what was taking place on part-time training courses. This extensive report provides a broadly Marxist sociological analysis based on ethnographic-style research in several part-time training courses. Training is presented in the report as a process of rupture, conflict, social reproduction and potential integration. The researchers identified youth work practice as taking place predominantly within a liberal 'social education repertoire', with some youth workers remaining in traditional conservative character building modes and a minority making a critical break towards Butters and Newell's preferred mode, the radical paradigm.

Realities of Training is impressive in its scope and radicalism; it is difficult to imagine a government funded review of training today suggesting that youth workers join with young people to overthrow the shackles of capitalism! Despite being a rather long and theoretical document it was influential in the field; for example, its models were used as the basis for the Enfranchisement Development Project (Leigh & Smart, 1985) which consisted of a series of events and encounters encouraging critical and personal reflection on the politics of youth work:

> Whatever its faults, it remains one of the few courageous efforts in youth work to cut through a self-congratulatory 'do-goodery', the illusion that we're all on the same side... It posed the right question from a class-conscious outlook: 'In whose interests are you doing this work?' (Taylor, 2009, p.327)

Realities of Training led to the establishment of a panel to review the training of part-timers and, subsequently, to a further report, *Starting from Strengths* (Bolger & Scott, 1984), based on qualitative research with volunteers, women, and black part-timers that was outlined in further detail in extension reports (P. Taylor, 1984; Wiggans, 1984; John & Parkes, 1984; Lacey & Sprent, 1984). Drawing this research together, Bolger and Scott (1984) argued that part-timers were a somewhat subordinated group of workers whose experience was not sufficiently valued, and who were seen primarily in

deficit terms. According to the research, part-timers and volunteers often felt neglected, under-valued and unheard, viewing many of their full-time colleagues as 'middle-class and academic' (p.7). The report's conclusions led to the replacement of group-work style training courses with 'portfolio' qualifications. This move towards recognising and accrediting the existing skills and experiences of part-timers was well intended but the new competency-based courses were widely perceived as an impoverished form of training (Davies, 2008; Norton et al, 1994):

> What initially had been conceived as essentially person-centred and liberally educational, increasingly became employer-centred and narrowly 'technicalist', especially in its interpretation of 'competences'. (Norton et al, 1994, p.21)

In 1998 Ofsted criticised portfolio courses as uneven, overly prescriptive and often of poor quality (Ofsted, 1998; Davies, 2008). Other than this Ofsted review, the literature on part-timers and their training seemed to drop off during the New Labour years despite significant developments. It is a matter of speculation as to why this happened; perhaps policy-makers (who had instigated or at least resourced the substantial reports of the 1970s and 1980s) came to identify quality with targets and outcomes measures rather than with the need for an educated workforce. Resources are available today for bodies willing to develop ‘outcomes frameworks’ (McNeil, Reeder & Rich, 2012) while it is difficult to imagine current or recent governments commissioning a substantial review of training and education for part-time youth workers.

National Occupational Standards for youth work were introduced in 2001 and translated into qualifying and training programmes that could be offered by any approved awarding bodies. By 2002, companies ABC and City and Guilds began to offer nationally accredited Level 2 and 3 youth work qualifications for volunteers and part-timers (Davies, 2008), followed by various other voluntary sector, further education and private providers. Meanwhile, as higher education participation has increased and diversified, a growing number of part-timers and volunteers (at least those who hope to make a career of youth work) now take up the option of professionally-accredited undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in youth work. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these routes tend increasingly to attract school-leavers, and that fewer older and more experienced youth workers now enrol at university, perhaps at least partly because the recent trebling of tuition fees has tended to dissuade self-funding mature students and

drastically reduced the extent of employer sponsorship (Independent Commission on Fees, 2013).

Part-time youth workers today

The most recent piece of empirical research I have found to focus specifically on the experiences of part-timers and/or volunteers is a PhD thesis from 1992 on the theory and practice of voluntary youth work, in which Andrew Heyes argued that youth work suffered from chronic underfunding and lack of recognition – a situation that persists today. Several recent empirical studies have included volunteers and part-timers alongside full-timers and young people, and some of these make specific (if brief) mention of part-timers' experiences of current policy and practice (in particular, Tiffany, 2007; Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010; Spence & Devanney, 2006; Lehal, 2010). Tiffany's (2007, p.40) study of street-based youth work emphasises the strengths and deficiencies of part-time youth workers:

> … many of the part-timers come from the local community. They bring with them a knowledge of 'the street' and the local community that few non-indigenous workers possess. Many have instinctive communicative abilities based on years of immersion in local culture and language. And many have life experiences similar to the young people they work with. These strengths are often instrumental in the [detached] project developing relationships with local young people. But the study finds that many of these workers lack theoretical knowledge... Typically, there might be a negative disposition to formal learning.

Tiffany recommends that part-timers be given adequate support and training, and employed on contracts that allow them sufficient paid time to be involved in planning and shaping provision. Other studies emphasise part-timers' particular vulnerability to, and criticisms of, the current policy context. In particular, Davies and Merton's (2009) study of twelve youth services found that part-timers,

> could seem seriously demotivated by the target culture, claiming that at their level its dilemmas were felt most acutely. They talked of pressure to get the numbers through and of crude counting and measuring by managers interested only in outcomes often unconnected with their practice – or young people's everyday realities. (p.14)

Similarly, Lehal (2010) found that part-timers in particular disliked target-driven paperwork because it took them away from direct work with young people. My study builds on these indicative findings, focusing specifically and in depth on the experiences

and perspectives of paid and voluntary part-time youth workers. This should not imply that part-timers' and full-timers' interests are always distinct; many of the issues and concerns in this thesis may also ring true for youth workers with full-time and managerial roles. Focusing on part-timers is a matter of emphasis, a research decision to privilege the views of practitioners whose voices are rarely heard. This should not imply that part-time youth workers are a homogenous group with a coherent 'voice'. There is substantial variation amongst part-time youth workers – including amongst the participants in my study – in terms of workplace setting, number of hours worked, geographical location, roles and responsibilities, employer, type of contract, and level of experience and qualifications. Grassroots youth workers come from diverse social groupings in relation to gender, ethnicity, class background, sexuality, disability, religion, age, and other aspects of identity, with women, ethnic minorities and people with dyslexia disproportionately represented (Mellor & McDonnell, 2010). By focusing specifically on part-timers and volunteers in all their diversity, this study explores the differences and contradictions within this section of the workforce as well as their shared experiences.

Policy context

This study takes place in the context of an unprecedented scale of threat to youth work in England and beyond, particularly in its publicly funded, open access and explicitly anti-oppressive forms. The most visible aspect of this threat in recent years has been the devastating cuts in local authority funding; even the former children's minister, Conservative MP Tim Loughton, agreed that cuts have disproportionately affected youth services (Barton & Edgington, 2014). The scale of closures and redundancies has been and remains dramatic, and many local youth services have closed most or all of their open access provision in favour of a much reduced targeted youth support service (Cabinet Office, 2014; McCardle, 2013; 2014a; Williams, 2011; Pidd, 2013; BBC, 2014; North Devon Journal, 2014).

A focus on cuts and redundancies, however, can risk obscuring the broader direction of change; particularly if these are understood as isolated and possibly short-term phenomena caused by the 2008 financial crash. Public spending cuts are often presented by governments as unfortunate but inevitable, a matter of responsible financial

management - even good housekeeping – in times of austerity (Stronach, Clarke & Frankham, 2014; Hall & O'Shea, 2013). As Jones (2010) points out, the so-called financial 'crisis' has not disrupted the major political parties' ongoing devotion to the market; rather, in the years since the crash, social inequality and traditionalist values have become more deeply embedded. This is exemplified by policy associated with the Big Society, launched by the Conservative-led Coalition Government when it came to power in 2010 (Cameron, 2010; Conservative Party, 2010a). The Big Society agenda is steeped in the values of traditional conservatism (through the celebration of a supposedly lost ideal of Britishness, where neighbours helped each other and managed their own affairs) combined with neoliberalism (through its reduced role for state-funded welfare, and the contracting out of services to entrepreneurs and private companies).

The current situation is particularly bleak for grassroots youth work, but it is not necessarily helpful to view it as new or exceptional, as it represents considerable continuity with a longer-term erosion of the post-war welfare settlement. Writing about youth work thirty years ago, Bolger and Scott (1984) noted that,

> A very prominent contemporary argument seeks to legitimate the bleeding away of hard won state-funded welfare. In its place will come the volunteer and the commercial entrepreneur.

Ten years later, Norton et al (1994) described aspects of new managerialism in youth work in the form of mechanistic planning, monitoring and evaluation based on specific behavioural objectives, and a preponderance of short-term contracts. France and Wiles noted in 1997 that youth work ‘no longer offers a universal service and even its voluntarism has been brought into question by targeted programme work' (p.72). Those changes observed during the last Conservative Government (1979-1997) were further embedded by New Labour (1997-2010) through a renewed focus on anti-social behaviour and employability, alongside the introduction of compulsory performance targets for government funded youth work (DfES, 2002). Youth work under New Labour gained funding while becoming increasingly individualised, short-term and office-based (Crimmens et al, 2004; Davies, 2008; Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010; IDYW, 2011; Jeffs & Smith, 2008; Spence & Devanney, 2006; Tiffany, 2007). None of these changes were particular to youth work, as is demonstrated by studies on the

changing roles of teachers, social workers, lecturers, healthcare staff, community workers, voluntary sector employees, museum staff, careers advisors and probation officers (Ball, 2008b; Day et al, 2006; Banks, 2011; Fraser, 2008; Gewirtz, 2002; Gewirtz et al 2009; Mooney & Law, 2007; Tlili, Gewirtz & Cribb, 2007; Chadderton & Colley, 2012; Justice Select Committee, 2011).

The Coalition Government's agenda represents both continuity and rupture in comparison to youth work under New Labour; significantly, it has dramatically reduced expenditure while intensifying the move from quasi-marketisation to direct privatisation and a focus on social investment (McGimpsey, 2013). Cuts are accompanied by performance targets, payment by results, competitive tendering and insecurity, while managerialism and marketisation have been given new impetus and emphasis. The Big Society agenda, whether interpreted as a celebration of volunteering and social entrepreneurship or as a pretext for cuts and privatisation, is the latest incarnation of continued moves towards the market and traditional values (the latter exemplified by the introduction of a 'National Citizen Service' for 16-years-olds and the expansion of cadet forces). None of these directions of change are significantly opposed by any of England's main political parties.

As resources dwindle, influential commentators in the field have suggested that youth work is all but finished: 'The remnants cannot be secured and much that lingers is not worth resuscitating even if that were possible' (Jeffs, 2011, p.7). I am not so sure. Perhaps now, more than ever, young people need spaces where they can chat and have fun, adults to talk to, and encouragement to develop critical understandings of their situations. In an uncertain context, this study gives space to part-time and volunteer youth workers' perspectives on how they are affected by the situations they are working in, and to the continuing value of passionate grassroots youth work.

Thinking about policy, passion and resistance

Policy, passion and resistance are the threads that weave in and out of the following chapters, sometimes more or less prominent, often overlapping or tangled together and rarely disappearing from view. These concepts became central to the thesis through the process of research, during interviews and discussion groups involving thirty-five grassroots youth workers, and are meaningful to me personally in my on-going role as a part-time and volunteer youth worker. I have made a deliberate decision not to adopt or propose an over-arching theoretical framework that explains 'once and for all' how policy, passion and resistance work in a grassroots youth work setting. Rather, I see them as fluid in relation to the particular contexts that youth workers and young people find themselves in, and I draw on a range of feminist, poststructuralist, Marxist and other critical perspectives to understand how they work in this context. It seems useful to include a brief discussion here of my theoretical starting points in relation to these core themes.

Policy is commonly understood as the proposal and implementation of plans of action or ways of doing things, whether by a government or organisation. I am primarily interested here in how national and local government policy affects (and is affected by) grassroots youth workers in their everyday work. Drawing on the work of critical education policy scholars, I understand policy as a process rather than an event, one that inevitably involves a level of struggle, contestation and negotiation (Ozga, 2000; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1981; Jones, 2003). The policy process is rarely straightforward and logical; at the level of practice, policies are 'inflected, mediated, resisted, misunderstood, or in some cases simply prove unworkable' (Ball, 2008a, p.7). Policy is not implemented by practitioners so much as enacted (or not enacted) in everyday life through 'jumbled, messy, contested, creative and mundane social interactions' (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012, p.2).

Resistance is inherent to this understanding of policy, and even when it does not seem to be present it is always possible (Foucault, 1978). However, the term 'resistance' can be problematic. While some of us broadly on the left may wish to claim resistance as our own, it can of course be used in relation to any political perspective. For example, a British National Party member might resist a local authority's equality objectives. I

acknowledge this broader usage, although in this thesis I will be using the word 'resistance' specifically in relation to the *dominant* direction of youth and education policy. In other words, my primary interest here is in resistance to aspects of a market-oriented policy settlement which is oriented towards 'the long-term social conditions for the continuing reproduction of capital' (Hall et al, 1978, p.218) and the corresponding growth of inequality and domination.

Another potential problem with the word 'resistance' is that it seems to call up different things for different people. From certain perspectives resistance can be seen almost everywhere and anywhere; for some, only mass working-class direct action really 'counts' as resistance; from other perspectives, resistance seems to disappear from the realms of possibility. In this thesis I take an inclusive, open-minded and open-ended approach to understanding resistance rather than closing down understandings by defining it precisely in advance. Broadly, I think of resistance as words, thoughts or actions that involve opposition to or subversion of the status quo (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Youth workers' resistance might encompass organised protest, strikes, refusal, vocal challenge, avoidance, disengagement and discontent. It might also mean developing counter-discourses that challenge dominant understandings, creating prefigurative practices that experiment with alternative ways of working, and building critical alliances between youth workers, young people, workers in other occupations, and activists. It is unlikely that individual youth workers only either 'comply with' or 'resist' policy; they are often engaged in both compliance and resistance at different times, or even at the same time.

In relation to managerial and marketised policies, diverse forms of resistance proliferate (Thomas & Davies, 2005a; 2005b); this kind of 'everyday resistance to everyday power' (Ball, 2013, p.148) is a key concern of this thesis because it is clearly present in grassroots youth workers' accounts. Traditional collective protest was also discussed and experienced in the course of this research; however, organised resistance was not the dominant form encountered (partly because it was not the focus of this research; I did not set out to interview activists or campaigners, and neither did I ask specific questions about protest in the interviews). By seeing resistance as diverse and dispersed I do not mean to signal that everything is resistance, or that all of its forms are equally

worthwhile; it seems likely that the relevance and effectiveness of different forms of resistance will be highly dependent on context, and that practitioners make choices for reasons that are worthy of respect and understanding. In the concluding chapter I will return to this discussion of what constitutes everyday resistance for grassroots youth workers and why it is important.

Where does passion fit in? Passion, love and care were themes I had not intended or expected to be central to this study, mainly because I had never given them much conscious thought. Despite (or perhaps because of) my own passionate attachment to youth work and care for the young people and colleagues I work with, I had not previously thought of these emotions as worthy of remark. This changed because positive emotional attachments to youth work and young people came out so loudly and strongly from the interviews and discussion groups that it felt vital to position them centrally to the thesis. I am reluctant at this point to demarcate precise relationship between passion and my other main themes; there *are* relationships here but they are often hard to grasp and this might not always be a bad thing. At some moments, youth workers' passion for their work seems to fuel their resistance to dehumanising policies; at other times, it might encourage them to go along with policies that go against their principles in order to preserve their job and their organisation. I will discuss this further in Chapter 4 and elsewhere.

Outline of the thesis

The central concern of this thesis is the world of grassroots youth work practice, how policy interacts with practice and how youth workers respond and resist. Each of the chapters looks at this concern from a slightly different angle. In the next chapter I outline the study's methodology, which is based on a mutually enriching relationship between research, activism and youth work practice. The chapter outlines the in-depth interview and discussion group methods which form the basis of the study, describes the research participants and considers ethical issues. I then use excerpts from my research diary to reflect on practitioner ethnography, a term that describes drawing on practice reflections and experiences for the purposes of research. This is followed by a discussion of the potential for, and limitations of, an activist scholarship approach.

Finally, I reflect on my approach to analysis and writing, including the use of fictional vignettes at the beginning and end of Chapters 3 to 6.

The main body of the thesis draws on interviews, discussion groups, research diary excerpts, policy and literature to discuss how grassroots youth workers in England experience their work in the context of policy changes. Chapter 3 looks at some of the positions grassroots youth workers take up under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government's Big Society agenda. Market values have become increasingly dominant in youth work policy and organisations, and both young people and grassroots youth workers seem to be treated as commodities that might be turned into profit. According to this logic simply 'working with young people' is not enough; even volunteers and small organisations need to be able to sell their work, both metaphorically and literally. The Big Society demands more from volunteers and low paid workers while making their work more vulnerable and precarious. At a time when the entrepreneur is a celebrated 'ideal', social enterprise is valorised over 'old' public sector and community organisational forms. Despite the limited evidence for organised collective resistance beyond a small number of mostly local struggles, the youth workers in this study question the logic of markets and enterprise, including those who are attempting – paradoxically – to reinterpret entrepreneurialism as an opportunity for creativity, autonomy and the rejection or troubling of market values.

While Chapter 3 starts with current policy and how it constrains and creates new forms of practice, Chapter 4 takes practice as its starting point. Even in challenging times, it is striking that grassroots youth workers talk consistently about their work in terms of love, commitment, care and passion. Emotional engagement might be seen as intrinsic to youth work and necessary for building relationships with young people; alternatively, it could be seen as self-exploitation at a time when youth work is increasingly governed by market principles and cost-cutting. The chapter explores the continuing relevance of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003), the theory that workers' emotional efforts are controlled and exploited by employers in the pursuit of profit, as well as newer theories of emotion management (Bolton, 2005; 2009). These theories of workplace emotions have a renewed relevance as private sector organisations and practices become normalised in youth work. The chapter closes with a discussion of the potential role of

passion and love in resisting the commodification of youth work.

Despite Coalition Government rhetoric about the need to strip away target cultures and intrusive databases, most of the grassroots workers in this study continue to experience extensive performance management systems, including databases that track individual and organisational performance against targets. Grassroots workers see target cultures as obstructive, distracting or even demeaning of good youth work, while some also experience them as an opportunity to be recognised as successful in an individualised and competitive system of judgement. Chapter 5 draws on theories of performativity as they are differently formulated by Stephen Ball (2003; 2013) and Judith Butler (1990; 2004) to consider how target cultures change not only what youth workers do but also who they are. In particular, the role of authenticity and shame are discussed in relation to performativity. The chapter closes with a consideration of how grassroots youth workers challenge, in different ways, some of the most inappropriate systems of audit and measurement.

Chapter 6 explores youth work's uncomfortable role in the tracking and surveillance of young people, focusing particularly on interviews with the detached (street-based) youth workers who took part in this study. Detached workers are historically situated at a distance from systems of state control and tend to see themselves as informal educators, working on young people's terms and on their territory. But can the street be considered as 'young people's territory' in the context of the increasingly authoritarian and privatised management of formerly public space? And can street-based youth workers legitimately claim to be 'detached' from systems of control when they are called upon to contribute to the policing and surveillance of the street? This chapter reflects on the experiences of grassroots youth workers who both take part in and resist systems of control and surveillance.

Marking a change in style and content, Chapter 7 looks in detail at the small grassroots organisation which I have been involved in during the course of this study. Voice of Youth is a workers' cooperative set up in 2011 by young people and youth workers based on the principles of critical youth work, equality and cooperation. At the centre of the chapter is a series of collectively written dialogues between part-time and volunteer

youth workers from Voice of Youth, discussing how their principles work in practice and thinking about the dilemmas, challenges, joy and excitement of running an idealistic youth work organisation. This is followed by a discussion of what can be learned from this example, and the possibilities and limitations of forming idealistic or radical organisations as a form of resistance.

Despite the serious challenges facing youth work, the passionate part-time and volunteer youth workers in this study provide a basis for hope. In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I return to discussion of the central themes of policy, passion and resistance which suffuse the working lives of grassroots youth workers, and draw together some of the ways in which these workers are engaged in everyday forms of resistance. Even in a highly challenging context, this study provides evidence that grassroots youth work can and often does take young people's side, challenge oppression, oppose tick-box and pathologising methodologies, and question the centrality of market logic. The thesis finishes with a summary of the study's key findings and suggests some implications for practice, policy and campaigning.

Although this thesis is written in academic style with the aim of contributing to a wider research community, I hope that elements of it will be useful for practitioners and activists within youth work. Perhaps it is also relevant to a broader range of workers in education, welfare and other settings who are facing similar struggles and challenges, and may be responding and resisting in similar ways. There are many whose work is affected by conditions that feel outside their control, and who sometimes feel too busy, tired and demoralised to know whether and how to negotiate, refuse, circumvent, fight, and create alternative ways of working. For these people (of whom I am one), the thesis does not provide a blueprint of 'what to do' or make specific recommendations. What it does instead, I hope, is draw on a particular world of practice to provide theoretical and empirical resources for recognition, critical reflection, creative thought, collective discussion and inspiration.

Chapter 2
Methodology

Youth work is not the only thing I have done in my life but it is the world I know best. I have drawn on this grounded knowledge and experience as a starting point and ongoing resource for the research, while also drawing in detail on the diverse perspectives and experiences of the thirty-five part-time and volunteer youth workers who have taken part in the study through interviews, discussion groups and collective writing. My rationale throughout has been to develop an open-ended and yet principled methodology that is consistent with youth work itself (Spence & Wood, 2011). Throughout the study I have been inspired by a range of critical research perspectives, particularly activist scholarship, ethnography, post-structural feminism and constructivist grounded theory, and have used and adapted methods and approaches from each of them.

This methodology chapter explains my research methods as well as my overall orientation towards the research. In the first section I describe and reflect on the interviews and discussion groups, which involved twenty-nine participants and form the main basis of the study. In the second section I write about how I have used a practitioner ethnography approach to incorporate my ongoing experience as a youth worker into the study; here, I also discuss the decision to write about the youth organisation I am involved with through discussions and collective writing with six of my colleagues. The third section elaborates on how the study is underpinned by an activist scholarship approach. I finish the chapter with a discussion of my approach to data analysis and writing.

Interviews and discussion groups

My intention throughout this research has been to place the voices of part-time and volunteer youth workers at the heart of my study. This is not meant to obscure my own role as researcher and practitioner; however, while my ongoing experience as a youth worker plays a significant role in this research (that I will discuss in more depth later), my perspective and understanding have been immeasurably enriched, balanced,

challenged and deepened through interviews and discussion groups with practitioners from a variety of settings, backgrounds and experiences. Twenty-two part-time and volunteer youth workers took part in conversational in-depth interviews between 2011 and 2013, and one of these workers and seven others took part in a series of three discussion groups in 2013. I will now reflect on my approach to the interviews and discussion groups, describe the research participants, and discuss ethics and researcher reflexivity in relation to interviewing.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are at the heart of this study, enabling detailed engagement with grassroots youth workers whose voices are rarely heard outside of their local context, let alone placed at the centre of research. I started with an open-ended and loosely structured approach to interviewing with the intention of refining this after the first set of interviews. I began by arranging interviews with eight detached (street-based) youth workers, contacted through an advertisement sent around the Federation for Detached Youth Work mailing list. This seemed a good place to start because I am already linked in to these networks as a detached worker myself; later interviews were not restricted to detached workers.

These initial interviews made up the first phase of research while also acting as a 'pilot', and I based my Masters in Research dissertation on this material. When arranging these interviews I was aware that some practitioners might feel uncomfortable in an ‘interview’ scenario, perhaps identifying the idea of a research interview with pressure to ‘get the answers right’. In recruiting interviewees I emphasised the conversational aspect of the interview, and aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere by giving interviewees the choice of meeting in a cafe, at the participant's workplace, or wherever they felt most comfortable. I explained at the beginning that the interview would take the form of a conversation about their work that could go in any direction, that I was interested in anything they had to say and that nothing was irrelevant. I started these 'interview-conversations' (McLean Hilker, 2014) by asking participants how they became involved in youth work and followed up their answer with further questions and thoughts, continuing in that way until we had covered a diverse array of issues.

These early interviews form part of the body of 'data' for this study, as well as having been useful as a learning experience and to refine my strategy for later interviews. I had been (and remain) influenced by feminist perspectives on interviewing as a two-way conversation to which I actively contribute (Oakley, 1990); however, I began to feel that I was perhaps over-emphasising the conversational aspect of the interviews. It is something of a 'pretence' to suggest that an interview is an ordinary informal chat, when whatever the participant says will be recorded, transcribed and analysed. I began to see a research interview more clearly as a *particular kind* of conversation that is nevertheless distinct from everyday talk. It ideally 'goes beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examines earlier events, views and feelings afresh' (Charmaz, 2006, p.26). This can be a useful opportunity for critical reflection by researcher and participant alike.

After transcribing and analysing the data from the initial interviews I designed an interview schedule for the subsequent interviews. I continued to start with a question about how the participant became a youth worker, as this had worked well in early interviews as a question that practitioners seemed interested and confident in replying to, often at length. From this starting point I focused on a tighter range of seven issues, selected either because they had elicited rich discussion amongst the initial participants, or (in the case of young people's and workers' identities) because they had been relatively absent from the 'interview-conversation' format. The interview schedule is shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Flexible schedule for in-depth interviews

Key theme	**Explanation**
Routes into youth work	How you came to be a youth worker
What you do	What kind of things you do at work, what a 'typical' day or week looks like
Young people	What kind of young people you work with, how you would describe them (perhaps including gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality etc.)

Key theme	Explanation
Your identity	How you would describe yourself, how young people see you, similarities and differences with the young people (perhaps including gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality etc.)
Being a part-time or volunteer youth worker	Differences between being part-time and full-time, paid and voluntary, advantages and disadvantages, would you rather be in a different position?
Likes / dislikes	What do you like about the work? What don't you like? What helps? What gets in the way? What changes have taken place in the time you've been a youth worker?
Training, education	Have you done youth work qualifications, what were they, what was your experience, how important are they?

This second phase of interviews involved a further fourteen youth workers in various settings including youth clubs, support work, project work, detached and street work, faith-based work, LGBT spaces and girls' groups. During this phase I still wanted interviewees to feel that they could shape the interview and focus on issues they found most important and I told them that I wanted them to talk about whatever *they* found interesting. The themes in the interview schedule often arose spontaneously during the interview, but when they did not I brought them up. I also welcomed discussion of other topics not listed on the schedule.

Of the twenty-two interviewees, seventeen took part in one-to-one in-depth interviews. The other five were interviewed in two small groups of three and two workers respectively; the members of these small groups knew each other well and were keen to be interviewed together. Both formats had distinct advantages. While the individual interviews provided time and space for participants to speak in detail and in a confidential setting, the interviews with small groups of colleagues enabled a relaxed environment in which participants responded to and questioned each other. Being interviewed with colleagues was reassuring for some participants who may have been reluctant to take part in an individual interview. As one participant commented:

> I don't like interviews. I don't like sitting down and talking about myself and I don't like politics and I don't like issues and I don't like any of it. But no, I quite enjoyed myself. I think it's the company that I was with. (Bridget)

The interviews lasted from one to two-and-a-half hours and covered a wide array of topics that it would be difficult to do justice to in this thesis. Several interviewees told me that they had enjoyed the interview and that it had been less formal than they had expected, and some emphasised that it was useful to have the chance to reflect on their work. For example, Rachel said she was 'happy to listen to young people all day but it's really nice for someone to listen to *me*!', while Laura (part of a small group interview) said 'I *loved* it!'. I recognise that the process might have been difficult and demanding for some and that they may have been less likely to share negative or ambivalent feelings about taking part. Sometimes the workers talked about issues that were upsetting, painful or enraging; at other times, for all I know, they might have felt annoyed, bored or frustrated. I felt somehow both exhausted and energised after each interview and I imagine that some participants will have found it an intense experience too.

Discussion groups

To complement the in-depth interviews I organised a series of three discussion groups to meet once a month for three months in early 2013. While the individual interviews had taken place in several different areas of England, the majority (twelve) were in London and South East England, and as I wanted to avoid a London bias I organised the discussion groups in a northern city. I advertised the discussion group series with a poster entitled: 'Part-time or volunteer youth worker? Interested in discussing your work?' I sent this to various networks in and around the city, asking workers to commit to all three sessions. Twelve people responded, and I sent them an information sheet about the research. Eight participants eventually took part of whom all attended the first meeting, six participated in the second and six came to the third. One of these participants took the role of co-facilitator alongside myself.

The discussion group drew on group interview and community philosophy methodologies. Group interviews encourage participants to respond to each other and develop understandings together (Bryman, 2008). In interactive group interviews in particular, 'the understandings that emerge among all parties during interaction – what they learn together – are as compelling as the stories each brings to the session' (Ellis

and Berger, 2003, p.165). As youth work is most often a group process, group discussions seemed particularly appropriate as a research method and would provide space for workers to meet each other and reflect on practice through a process of conversation and deliberation.

During the group discussions I followed a community philosophy model in which participants take an active role in shaping the discussion of complex concepts and issues that they choose themselves (Tiffany, 2009; Touch, 2013). In community philosophy the agenda is largely in the hands of the participants and they formulate and decide on the questions to be discussed. My role as facilitator was to guide the discussion, attend to group process and provide discussion stimuli. I had attended training on community philosophy facilitation a few months previously.[7] As a relatively new community philosophy facilitator I decided to co-facilitate these sessions with another youth worker who had attended same training. Co-facilitation was beneficial because we could take turns leading activities and discussions, and each of us noticed different opportunities to follow up the discussion. Sessions were two hours long with a break and included times for reflection. The content of each session is outlined in *Table 2* below.

Table 2: Discussion group topics

Session	Discussion topics
One	Introduction to community philosophy, discussion on confidentiality, group agreement. Evaluating youth work (using post-it notes): what do you think is good and bad about being a part-time and / or volunteer youth worker, and what would you like to change? Developed, discussed and prioritised questions for future meetings. Philosophical inquiry using question identified by the group: 'Why are youth workers and young people under-valued?' Evaluation of the first session and discussion of future sessions.

[7] The community philosophy training was provided free by SAPERE (The Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education), as part of a project funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation.

Session	Discussion topics
Two	Reflection on previous session. Objects: each person brought an object which for them related in some way to youth work – these were used as a stimulus for discussion. Average day at work, what it is like to be part-time / voluntary and how it would be different to be paid / full-time. Returned to questions identified last time and decided as a group to discuss the question: 'Do youth workers share the same values?'
Three	Inquiry using a question chosen by the group which arose in previous discussions: 'Do we need to be driven by outcomes?' Inquiry using a question from the first session which the group wanted to return to: 'Where is equality in youth work?' Discussion on youth workers' backgrounds and identities, and whether / how these are important. Evaluation of the three sessions and the whole process.

I found the content and process of these discussions particularly rich and thoughtful, and the final meeting felt like the culmination of a powerful process. Participants were keen to interact with each other and reflect on their views, and their body language as well as their words showed a great deal of engagement, thoughtfulness and interest. Unlike a traditional interview, they responded mostly to each other rather than relating mainly to me. The success of the group seemed at least partly related to the fact that the participants had identified the questions themselves, and were therefore genuinely interested and invested in what they are talking about. The group discussions were identified by practitioners as useful in their own right. It is worth quoting some of the participants' reflections at the end of the process:

> I just want to say, it has been amazing. I feel like I've learnt *so* much [...] It has been great meeting you all, to know that you *can* do it and make a difference. (Navaeh)

> I feel optimistic, and even though sometimes I feel like I'm a bit like a dreamer [...] there's hope and there's optimism. I think that that's what I've taken from this. (Nicola)

There was a clear feeling amongst the group that youth work was under threat, so it was interesting that Navaeh and Nicola felt optimistic after the discussions. Participants emphasised the importance of having time to speak and reflect with other youth workers, and valued the group process.

> There's been many times when I've sat here and thought one way, and then by the end of it I think something different. Definitely learned something from everyone in the group, changed my opinions on some of the things. (Mark)

> When we stop questioning, when we stop being unsure, maybe that's the time we get complacent in our work, and that for me, that state of frustration, unsettlement, is not always comfortable, it's not always nice, but [...] maybe it informs or it helps to do better work. (Mickie)

These views seem to challenge any notion of research participants' opinions as individual or 'static' and emphasise the dynamic nature of how youth workers see themselves in relation to their work.

Research participants

Twenty-nine people participated in either interviews or discussion groups with one person taking part in both. I contacted them through informal and professional networks for youth workers from different areas of England.[8] England was specified because of significant differences in policy in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where many of the decisions influencing youth work are devolved to these separate jurisdictions. To be eligible for participation, interviewees needed only to define themselves as a part-time or volunteer youth worker. Within this group my aim was to attract participants from a wide variety of work roles, organisations, locations and backgrounds. At first recruitment was hampered by cuts: some youth services have been abolished; some organisations were making all or most of their part-time workers redundant; others were no longer able to support volunteers; and some workers told me that they felt too insecure or stressed to make time for an interview. Despite this situation, there was a steady trickle of willing participants. In the later phases of the research I made specific efforts to reach youth workers in particular situations to help me explore themes and ideas emerging from earlier interviews and policy analysis, a process known in

[8] I identified interviewees mainly by contacting local authority youth services and voluntary sector organisations in different areas of England, and through word of mouth at youth work events.

grounded theory as 'purposive sampling' (Charmaz, 2006; Hood, 2007). For example, I was particularly interested to find youth workers employed by social enterprises and private companies, as well as those attempting to practice in opposition to profit-oriented modes.

The sample of participants in the research is diverse, but it should be noted that it is also particular and cannot be seen as representative of all forms of youth work. More paid part-timers than volunteers came forward, and although I made specific attempts to contact volunteers, most of those who defined themselves as volunteer youth workers also worked in closely related paid work. Hence the study reflects the experiences of paid and unpaid part-time youth workers who are closely involved in youth work and related fields in their everyday lives, and does not represent the large number of people who perhaps volunteer one night a week in their local youth club and have no other involvement in youth work. This bias was unintentional but perhaps not surprising. It could be that volunteers might be less confident to take part in research or have less time or support to do so, or even that some volunteers do not identify themselves as youth workers. The other particularity of this sample was that all of the participants were engaged in *open access* youth work such as youth clubs, street-based youth work, mobile bus provision, girls work or LGBT groups. This is somewhat surprising, given the well-documented trends towards targeted youth support work (IDYW, 2011; Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010). Some of the participants were also involved in targeted forms of work alongside their open practice, and often communicated ambivalence about referring to their targeted work as ‘youth work’.

Where the sample of participants is perhaps more reflective of the field is in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, age and other identity characteristics, although given the lack of current data available it is difficult to state this with confidence. Neither can I quantify the social groupings of the participants of this study because, in keeping with the unstructured approach of my early interviews, I did not directly ask interviewees how they would describe themselves in terms of gender, ethnicity and so on. I had rather naively assumed that these issues would come up naturally in conversation. In practice, however, the first few interviewees rarely spoke about social categories such as gender, 'race' and class, either in relation to their own identities or those of the young

people they worked with. Perhaps this relative silence is interesting in itself. I felt it necessary to be able to talk about social categories as part of a political commitment to discussing inequalities and power (London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004) and yet I did not want to use a demographics questionnaire or end the interviews with 'a few quick questions' on class, 'race' and gender, as these tactics might imply that I take identity questions as fixed and factual, less complex than the other issues we had talked about. As Ladson-Billings (2012) argues:

> We are using crude measures to sort and slot people into categories – Black, White, Latino, immigrant, English-speaking, low-income, disabled, first-generation etc. - as if we don't live our lives across multiple categories of being or as if some of the categories that are more salient in our lives aren't invisible. (p.118)

Instead I decided to ask about young people's and youth workers' identities as core themes for the second phase of interviewing. This led to some interesting and nuanced conversations, and interviewees often expressed reservations about labelling young people and themselves, particularly in terms of class identity (this is consistent with other research, for example see Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). The disadvantage of this open and flexible approach was that I do not have consistent or comparable information for each participant. It is customary when undertaking qualitative sociological research with a relatively small number of participants to include a table showing gender, class, ethnicity and other relevant social groupings that provides a useful ‘at a glance’ overview of the range of participants involved in the research. This would be difficult to provide here, as the early interviews did not include discussion of identity, while later interviews involved in-depth conversation that often touched on the ambiguity, fluidity and complexity of identity.

Rather than a table, then, I am including short paragraphs describing each research participant. Inevitably, these paragraphs convey a partial view of these youth workers; however, they give some idea of who they are and the positions they are speaking from. Taken together, they also provide a snapshot of some of the ‘kinds of people’ involved in grassroots youth work today. The paragraphs include information on the participants’ youth work roles, where they work and who for, whether they are a volunteer or part-timer or both, their qualifications and other work experience, and aspects of their

identity such as class and ethnicity where these were discussed. I present the following information about them in the present tense although, of course, their situation may have changed since they participated in the research. The participants are presented here in alphabetical order using the names they chose to be known by for the purposes of this research.

Table 3: Research participant descriptions

Alan is a 'substantial' part-time assistant youth worker in a local authority youth service in the London borough where he lives, and is employed for 31.5 hours per week. Aged 30, he has been a youth worker for ten years. His current work includes youth clubs, neighbourhood work, outreach and administrative responsibilities. He takes on extra work where possible and would like to be a full-time youth worker if he could continue to focus on face-to-face open access work. He is white and middle-class and has a master's degree in youth work. (Individual interview, 2012)
Arimas is working on a voluntary basis to set up a social enterprise with young people. She is in the third year of a part-time youth and community work degree course and in that way sees herself as a youth worker, but questions the importance of this label. She worked for the local authority youth service of a northern city until being made redundant the previous year when the service closed. Arimas is a British Muslim of North African descent. As co-facilitator of the discussion groups she had limited chance to contribute her own opinion, so unfortunately we hear relatively little from her in the thesis. (Discussion groups 1, 2 & 3, 2013)
Billie is a volunteer with a youth organisation in the neighbourhood where she lives, and volunteers at the youth club once a week as well as being involved in administration and fundraising. The youth club is mostly attended by Roma young people. Billie is white and has a working-class background, having grown up on a 'really dodgy' council estate. She was the first in her family to go to university. Her day job involves working as a community development worker for a housing association in the northern city where she lives, a role which overlaps with her voluntary youth work at times. (Individual interview, 2012)
Bridget has two part-time youth work jobs in an inner-London borough. In her main job she is contracted as a self-employed sessional youth worker supporting young people to find work, running a weekly youth club and doing some outreach work. She also works for a small community organisation at another weekly youth club. She got involved in youth work when she came out of prison and became a mentor. She hopes to study to become an adult education teacher. She is black with Caribbean heritage and does not refer to her class status. (Interviewed with Laura and Lucy, 2011)

Callie is employed six hours per week (2 evenings) by her local authority in the south west of England, working on a mobile youth bus in villages and towns. She also runs a weekly youth club for a village council, a role for which she is paid 4 hours per week. She takes on extra work where available and wants to be a full-time youth worker. She came into youth work after being made redundant as a careers advisor and having a number of short-term jobs. She also volunteers as a guide leader and works part-time in a school. She is white and middle-class and both her parents are teachers; she refers to her background as 'sheltered'. (Individual interview, 2012)
Diana currently works on a housing estate, employed on a temporary basis by a charity that is subcontracted by a local authority that has shut its youth service. She works ten hours per week split over four evenings. Previously she was a beauty therapist and became a youth worker after starting an access course at university. She had also until recently been working for a local youth work business. She has completed her Level Two qualification in youth work, is now studying for a Level 3 Diploma, and hopes to set up a new organisation with Keiron. She is white and working-class and lives in a northern city. (Interviewed with Keiron, 2013)
Forde is employed as a part-time outreach and detached youth worker by a London borough council, where she works on a mobile bus provision and helps run a girls group at a youth centre. She has been involved in youth work since volunteering aged 18, and has previously worked in a youth centre, a children's home and in youth participation. She says she has ‘never really been academic’ although she has an NVQ Level 3 in youth work. She hopes to bring her interest in hair and beauty to her work with young people and is thinking of setting up a social enterprise. She is 24 years old and Black British. (Individual interview, 2011)
John works four nights per week in town-based youth clubs and on the street for a local authority youth service in South East England, as well as taking any additional sessions available and doing some extra voluntary work. He first became a youth worker at his local youth club when he was fifteen, getting involved through a peer education project and then becoming a volunteer. He is now 22 and is in the second year of a youth and community work degree, and also works as a carer on a casual basis. (Individual interview, 2012)
Keiron is employed three evenings per week at a large new youth centre in a northern city run by a charity that is largely funded by business. He is also involved in various other youth related activities including sports and music, and works at his local youth club where he started volunteering aged 15. He is from a Black African background and moved to England when he was a teenager. He is studying for a youth work diploma and hopes to set up a social enterprise with Diana. (Interviewed with Diana, 2013)

Laura has been employed as a detached youth worker for three years, working variable part-time hours for a local charity. She is responsible for some administration and coordination alongside face-to-face work. Previously she worked in a nursery and studied dance and psychology. She feels she is seen as middle-class and white by young people in the UK, although she was perceived as an immigrant in the European country where she grew up and where her parents were refugees from South America. (Interviewed with Bridget and Lucy, 2011)
Leo is a part-time detached youth worker in a northern town. He has a day job in an adjoining borough as a 'key worker' supporting young people who are out of work or education. He does not necessarily identify this day job as youth work although he draws on both experiences in group discussions. He has been a youth worker for several years and has a degree in youth and community work. He might be perceived as white and working-class although he was not asked about his background. (Participated in discussion groups 1 & 2, 2013)
Lorenzo is employed 16 hours per week by a charity in a large youth centre in a northern city, and works extra hours where they are available. He became a youth worker through voluntary work after being made redundant as an electrician, and is also experienced as a sports coach and worked for a summer on the National Citizen Service. He is in the second year of a youth and community work degree. He is 27 years old, working-class and mixed race, and finds class more salient than race in his life experience and view of young people. (Individual interview, 2012)
Lorne is a part-time self-employed and volunteer youth worker for a cooperative in London, while also studying part-time for his youth work degree and doing a variety of casual paid work. He got involved in youth work over ten years ago, running workshops at an art gallery and at a project for young people questioning their gender identity. He then worked as a manager in a local authority LGBT youth project. He is 29 years old, white and middle-class, and grew up and still lives in the multi-cultural disadvantaged borough where he works. (Individual interview, 2012)
Louise is a volunteer with a local authority detached youth work team in a southern city centre, working with young people aged 18-24, as well as being involved in a campaign to save her local youth service from closure. She has also worked at youth clubs in a village and on a social housing estate. She started volunteering after becoming disillusioned with her previous role in banking and finance. She is in the second year of her degree in youth and community work. We did not discuss class or race in the interview. (Individual interview, 2011)

Lucy is employed by a charity two evenings per week doing detached youth work and supporting young people to find work. She is studying for a social work master's degree and wants to be a social worker while also perhaps remaining a part-time youth worker. She was previously a receptionist and became involved in youth work after volunteering in her local youth club. Lucy has been in her current youth work job for around three years. (Interviewed with Laura and Bridget, 2011)
Mahad is employed as a part-time detached youth worker by the local authority in the London borough where he lives. He also works part-time in a sports centre as a gym instructor and personal trainer. He became a youth work volunteer through a family member who was involved in a community action project with the local detached youth workers. We did not discuss class or race in the interview. (Individual interview, 2011)
Mark is a part-time youth worker for a youth mentoring and leadership charity in a northern city. He is in the final year of a degree in youth and community work, and strongly identifies as a youth worker even though he does not always identify his current role as youth work. He became involved over a decade earlier as a trainee youth worker for the detached youth project he was involved in as a young person. He is black and mentions that he looked up his class on the BBC Great British Class survey and says it came out 'below working-class, one above the bottom' (emergent service sector). (Participated in discussion groups 1, 2 & 3, 2013)
Mickie is a part-time and volunteer youth worker for an LGBT youth organisation in a northern city. She is also employed four days a week at a youth volunteering organisation, a role she does not entirely identify as youth work. She is comfortable talking about her identity and defines herself as a feminist, bisexual, white woman from a working-class family, having grown up on 'a very low income receiving benefits'. She has some Irish traveller heritage. Mickie is in the second year of a youth and community work degree. (Individual interview, 2012; participated in discussion groups 1 & 3, 2013)
Navaeh is a volunteer in a youth club in an area of town where she grew up and still lives. She is a working-class white 25-year-old although she looks younger and often refers to herself as young. She is relatively new to youth work and is in the first year of a degree in youth and community work. She feels in some ways that she would like to stay as a volunteer as she enjoys focusing on the face-to-face role rather than the administration she sees her manager having to do. (Participated in discussion groups 1, 2 & 3, 2013)

Nicola is a volunteer for a northern inner city youth club run by a local charity. She has been involved in youth work for ten years and is currently in the final year of a community and youth work degree. She has experience of working on other youth projects including the National Citizen Service. She is black and working-class. (Participated in discussion groups 1, 2 & 3, 2013)
Olly is employed 19 hours per week as a part-time youth worker by a South East England local authority, working in a small town's youth centre and as a detached worker in the surrounding rural area. He became a youth worker thirteen years ago after an injury required him to give up his job as a decorator; he had been coaching youth football and cricket, and decided to give youth work a try. He describes himself as 'ordinary working-class, married with two kids' and is white. He also volunteers as a cricket coach and scout leader. He has a Level 3 NVQ in youth work. (Individual interview, 2012)
Ox is a part-time youth worker at a local authority youth club in London where he has worked for ten years. Currently he works there on Friday nights and supports their youth football team on Sundays. He has completed an NVQ in youth work. Until recently he has had a day job as a telephone fundraiser. He is black and is a dad. He defines himself as middle-class because he passed his 11-plus and went to grammar school, although he says he has working-class roots and his dad was an electrical engineer. (Individual interview, 2012)
Quincie is employed 18 hours per week by a London borough local authority as an outreach and mobile bus youth worker and has experience in a wide range of roles including youth justice, health and schools work. She is currently in the second year of a youth and community degree. Her route into youth work involved volunteering in a youth theatre project. We did not discuss class or race in the interview. (Individual interview, 2011)
Rachel had recently left her role as a detached youth worker for a local authority in southern England, where she had worked 12 hours per week over four years in various areas of a large town. She had also worked in youth clubs and on other projects, and found the youth work role had fit in well with parenting as she could share the childcare with her partner. She became involved in youth work through a previous role working for the Connexions careers service. She has an NVQ in youth work. (Individual interview, 2011)

Reema is a volunteer youth worker in a disadvantaged area of a large northern city. She recently completed a degree in social work and mental health nursing and works with probation services. She identifies both as a social worker and a youth worker, and feels young people are more comfortable talking to youth workers than social workers. Unfortunately she was only able to participate in the first discussion group, so we do not hear much from her in the thesis. (Participated in discussion group 1)
Sam works as a teaching assistant in a school in a northern town, and also runs an after-school youth group on a voluntary basis with another teaching assistant in the school. She sees herself as a youth worker in both of these roles and particularly in the after-school group. She is on the first year of a youth and community work degree, is white and working-class, and describes herself as 'a bit more mature at 41'. (Participated in discussion groups 1, 2 & 3, 2013)
Sarah works for a youth-led social enterprise that she set up with a colleague. She is paid seventeen hours per week on minimum wage, although in reality she works many more hours unpaid. She grew up in the borough where she works, is from a working-class background and would describe herself as 'white and black African'. However, she is not keen on categories, saying, 'If you wanna define me, go ahead! But I'm not gonna put myself into a box... the only kind of definition I would say "yep that's me" is a youth worker.' She has two degrees including one in youth work. (Individual interview, 2013)
Tracey was initially led to do youth work as a Christian, and is currently coordinating a street-based project for a charity with a Christian ethos. She has been a youth worker for many years. She is also a qualified teacher, and combines supply teaching with twenty hours per week at the youth project. She is white, and works in a predominantly white working-class town in the North East of England. She says, 'my background would be working-class but I feel very middle-class now'. (Individual interview, 2012)
Zandra works around 20 hours a week for a business working with young people who are not in education, employment or training, or at risk of dropping out. She also works 5 hours per week for a charity running an open access youth group. Both of these roles are in a London borough, and she is contracted in both as a self-employed sessional worker. She says she would currently be seen as 'working-class, very poor', but would have been seen as middle-class when she had a professional job in housing. She is Black British. She began a youth work degree but left during her first year. (Individual interview, 2013)

Ethics and reflexivity

I have aimed to integrate issues of ethics and reflexivity throughout this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis rather than seeing them as a separate concern, but there are specific issues relating to interviews and discussion groups that I need to include here. Although some aspects of preparing for institutional ethical approval were useful, others (such as wordy consent forms) felt overly bureaucratic for a relatively low-risk study. Conversely, some issues that seemed relatively straightforward in terms of ethical approval were far more complex in practice. Confidentiality is a good example of this. I erased all references to real names, places and organisations in the transcripts and kept references to real names in a safe place. However, it occurred to me that these measures may not have been enough to guarantee confidentiality – particularly with such a small sample. For example, a manager who encourages a part-time employee to take part might recognise them in a published article if I am not very careful about what I include. Thus I attempted to think about ethics in their situated context throughout the study rather than simply as a process of jumping through the hurdles of ethical approval (Rea, 2012).

I invited participants to read their interview transcripts and remove anything they did not want published, and told them that any aspect of what they said could be left out. Some interviewees took me up on this. I have not changed any details beyond names of people, places and organisations, but there are times when I made a decision to simply miss out information if I felt it could identify the person concerned. In the discussion groups it was important to discuss internal confidentiality to ensure that participants realised they should not divulge the identity of any other member of the group (Tolich, 2004); I also suggested that it might not be a good idea to bring up extremely sensitive issues in the group, and said I would be happy to meet with anybody outside of the group either for an informal chat or an individual interview.

Some participants seemed reassured or interested that I was a youth worker myself, and this commonality appeared to help build trust (see Ochieng, 2010; Oakley, 1990). The identities of researchers and participants inevitably interact in complex ways, however, and it is important not to let shared identity obscure the recognition of power relations and differences (Archer, 2010; Finch, 1984; Reay, 1996; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I

might see myself as a ‘fellow part-time youth worker’ but this might not be how I am primarily perceived by participants. Often my academic status was alluded to in different ways; some interviewees told me pointedly that they were 'not academic' and seemed initially uncomfortable in the interview situation, while others built common ground with my academic involvement, saying (for example) that they volunteered to take part because they were glad that youth workers were doing PhDs, or sympathised (from their own experiences of studying) with the difficulty of finding willing research participants.

As well as my role as a youth worker, other aspects of my identity (or perceived identity) might deepen or limit what I am told. This, too, is more complex than might be assumed. Oakley (1990) suggests that women tend to feel most comfortable talking to other women, while Finch (1984) warns of the exploitative potential of 'trading on' shared identity by inviting confidences that interviewees may later regret. As a white researcher I am aware that black interviewees might be guarded in sharing some experiences with me; for example, some are likely to have experienced being disbelieved or misrepresented by white people if they talk about racism (Gillborn, 2008; Mac an Ghaill 1993). I am uncomfortable with defining myself in class terms - I grew up in social housing living on benefits and in receipt of free school meals, although my relatives are from a variety of class backgrounds and positions – and I am aware that this confusion can make me reticent to discuss class in straightforward terms. Perceptions of my classed identity may also depend on whether I am seen primarily as a youth worker or as a PhD student; in general, my indeterminate accent probably makes me appear relatively middle-class. Overall I have attempted to be reflective about the complex power-charged social relationships that will always exist in an interview situation and remain aware that these might not always be transparent or one-dimensional.

What interviewees say and do not say, then, is significantly shaped by the context of the interview and specific interactions with the interviewer (Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). As I attempted to tip the balance of power towards the interviewee by encouraging them to answer questions in the way they choose, or facilitated discussion groups that developed and chose their own questions, I need to acknowledge that I

retain formal power in the research encounter. I can decide where to ask for clarification and elaboration, where to let the conversation flow and when to finish the interview; I am also the one making the decisions during transcription and analysis. I need to take this responsibility seriously. To do so, I have attempted to be particularly attentive to what participants are telling me and to what remains silent, rather than selecting quotes as isolated 'sound bites'.

These complexities are all part of the craft of interviewing, a skill learned through practice rather than a mechanistic following of rules (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As I become more experienced I feel more able to create an environment where silences and uncertainties are comfortable, and I am learning to say less and to ask better questions, but I still find it frustrating when transcribing to hear myself asking rambling questions and missing opportunities to follow things up. Despite mistakes, however, the interviews and discussion groups have been incredibly satisfying, stimulating and emotionally engaging. They have brought me into contact with the reflective and varied perspectives of a range of committed, thoughtful and interesting youth workers. These workers have challenged and enhanced my understandings of a world I thought I already knew and I am enormously grateful. I will continue to reflect on my learning about the methodological process as I move on now to discuss how I have drawn on my ongoing role as a youth worker for the research.

Practitioner ethnography

Alongside the interviews and discussion groups this study draws on reflections and observations on my youth work practice, adapting ethnographic methodology to use my experiences as 'data' for the research. I have been an active part-time and volunteer youth worker throughout this study, working first for a charity and then for a workers' co-operative in Hackney, East London. During my master's degree (which constituted the first stage of this research) I was employed two evenings per week by a medium-sized local charity where I had worked full-time for three years prior to my studies. I kept an observational and reflective research diary on this work from May to August 2011. By the time of starting my PhD research I had left this organisation to set up a small youth workers' co-operative, Voice of Youth (VOY). This has involved working

mostly on a voluntary basis one or more evenings per week, taking part in detached youth work, community centre work, summer playschemes and specific projects as well as being involved in meetings, organisation and administration. Most of my diary extracts in this thesis come from my time with the co-operative, VOY. In this section I draw on research diary extracts to reflect on what I mean by practitioner ethnography, how I have drawn on practice as part of this research, and some of the ethical and practical issues involved.

Being a practitioner and a researcher

> Cycling between home and university, I travel through the area where I work. Has youth work become a place that I'm only passing through on my research journey? The metaphor is perhaps too obvious, but there might be something in it. Most ethnographers get closer to the world they are studying while they're doing field work, whereas for me, doing a PhD has meant the opposite: a subtle loss, a slow pulling away. I still feel like a youth worker, but I am less immersed in the practice than I was two years ago, and feel guilty about it. Then, I feel guilty that I'm spending too much time doing youth work when I could be studying. Paradoxically, I am drawing on my youth work identity *for* my research at the same time as this identity is becoming weaker *because* of the research.
>
> (Research diary, December 2012)

Carrying out ethnographic research in my place of work has been stimulating, fun and satisfying. It has also been confusing, distancing and worrying at times, as can be seen from the diary extract above. Whereas interviews are easily recognisable as 'data', actively engaging in youth work does not feel like research, especially because I would be doing youth work whether or not I was doing a PhD. Ethnographic methodology texts are helpful for their focus on researcher reflexivity and debates about being an insider and an outsider, but still, trying to fulfil all of the conventions of ethnography would be riddled with problems. I have rarely felt I am observing - even as a participant - because I have responsibilities and a role that is (at that moment) more pressing than the needs of my research. I enjoy writing reflectively about my practice, but I do not want my thesis to focus too much on myself. Introducing other people into my recordings is more interesting, but ties me in ethical knots. As a result my early writing incorporated barely any field notes; it all just seemed too complicated.

Alongside these challenges, there are also advantages to treating my work

ethnographically. Some aspects of youth work are rarely discussed in interviews and yet arise repeatedly in my research diary: the long-term, slow-burn, up-and-down nature of relationships; the random chats with colleagues and young people; the times when we don't see anyone and not much is happening. To describe and analyse what it is like to be a youth worker I need to include these elements of the everyday, the normal and the boring that are best captured by 'being there' over a long period. In this way, practitioner ethnographers 'are more than just participants: they live and have lived the experience that they want to investigate' (Barton, 2008, p.11).

I define practitioner ethnography as research undertaken by a practitioner in their workplace over an extended period which aims to increase knowledge of a culture or setting. This is subtly different most forms of practitioner research which tend to be defined as 'research conducted by practitioners for practice purposes' (Dodd & Epstein, 2012, p.5; see also Altrichter, 1993; Barton, 2008; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McLeod, 1999; Stenhouse, 1975). The seemingly self-evident association of practitioner research with practice application does not account for the potential for research which is more open-ended or aims to influence theory, policy or activism. I hope that my research does not just sit on a shelf and that much of it is useful to practitioners, but I do not count it as useless if it is not immediately applicable to my practice setting and neither would I want to limit it to that single specific setting. Other writers from the youth work field agree that practitioner research can and should be about developing theory as well as practice:

> … the generation of knowledge to develop theory (i.e. knowledge that can develop our understanding of the social world and improve our explanations of how it changes, develops or remains the same) is a crucial responsibility for social researchers generally, and for practitioner-researchers in particular. (Cullen, Bradford & Green, 2012, p.11)

The exploratory and long-term nature of ethnography is particularly appropriate in this endeavour. Although practitioner ethnography has been challenged for being too mired in the world of practice (Hammersley, 1992), my starting point is that this method can make a valuable, insightful and ethical contribution to knowledge; but that its differences need to be recognised and its potential problems taken seriously. I will now discuss some of these differences and challenges in more detail.

Familiarity and strangeness

> Entering the community flat there is a familiar faint smell of stale cigarettes and dust. The ground-floor one-bed council flat is allocated for the use of the estate cleaner and the TRA (Tenants' and Residents' Association). We meet there at the beginning and end of our evening sessions to do our planning and evaluation. The main room is painted with wide stripes of yellow, pink, blue and green from when our young women's group of three or four years ago decided to decorate. More recently, someone has installed a big pot plant and a wall-sized whiteboard. Sometimes we invite young people in for activities or discussions, and with six or seven of us it feels pleasantly crowded and sociable. There's an office in what would have been the bedroom; the door's locked and we don't have the key. In the tiny kitchen there's a disproportionately large quantity of crockery, slightly sticky, piled precariously in formica wall cupboards; an overfilled and possibly illegal ashtray; and seedlings planted by the gardening project growing unconvincingly in cardboard toilet roll centres on the windowsill. Finally there is a standard council-flat bathroom, the bath incongruous and presumably never used. The room incongruously reminds me of my childhood, the layout and even the taps the same as they were thirty years ago and 150 miles away. The toilet is not the cleanest, but is useful after long evenings out in the cold.
>
> (Research diary, June 2012)

The above recording is an attempt at a relatively straightforward ethnographic description of one of the places where I work, and yet it is somewhat unconventional because I see it through the lens of my past and present engagement with this space. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.115) write that for ethnographers:

> There must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual 'distance'. For it is in the space created by this distance that the analytic work of the ethnographer gets done... If and when all sense of being a stranger is lost, one may have allowed the escape of one's critical, analytic perspective.

Such advice is useful for ethnographers entering a new setting, but practitioner ethnographers are not strangers and cannot pretend to be. It would be neither ethically nor professionally appropriate to hold back from my colleagues or the young people I work with, and nor would it be analytically useful; after all, it is the experience of *being* a youth worker and *doing* youth work that I am in a particularly good position to investigate. Here I agree with Shaw (2005) that 'terms like “insider” and “outsider” are useful as much for the complexities they raise as for the directions in which they point' (p.1238).

Nevertheless, the process of writing and interpreting field notes helps me to challenge

my preconceptions and approach familiar settings with new eyes. Writing the above extract reminds me *as a researcher* about things that I had stopped noticing *as a practitioner*; for example, the stale smell, sticky cups and stripy walls that I take for granted in a place I visit every week. In the above passage I might note the importance of space: how a place can be transformed by how it is used; how the past (the decorating project) leaves an imprint on the present; how a youth worker might feel both connected to and estranged from the place they work because of their own past; how other people (the Tenants' and Residents' Association members, the estate cleaner) are part of the context of youth work. In the end, I have written about none of these things in the thesis; my research diary is like any data in that only a tiny proportion of the available material has been directly included, and yet what is left out has often still informed my analysis. The importance of keeping a diary of youth work observations and experiences is not limited to the relatively small number of excerpts included in the finished thesis; my ongoing involvement in youth work has also helped me to think about the relationship between theory and practice, and sensitised me to issues encountered through other research methods.

As well as using my research diary for field recordings and analytical notes, I have also written more personal and reflective pieces. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.192) argue that keeping a journal promotes:

> … precisely the sort of internal dialogue, or thinking aloud, that is the essence of reflexive ethnography. Such activity should help one avoid lapsing into the 'natural attitude' and "thinking as usual" in the field.

Reflective writing has helped me to think through many questions and puzzles, and these parts of my diary are often the easiest to write. In contrast, making descriptive field notes has varied from enjoyable and satisfying to boring, embarrassing and painful, a contrast that other ethnographers have experienced (Jackson, 1990; Lareau, 1996). I often feel self-conscious about these recordings, feeling that they might expose me not only as an incapable ethnographer but also as an inadequate youth worker.

Researching the self

> My mind is all over the place and I can't concentrate. Today (for once) I have a whole day available for study, but my youth work role distracts me. By mid-morning I have received ten emails about work – several about the

> residential this weekend, one wanting feedback on a letter, another about some funding I applied for. I reply to the most urgent and close down the internet browser. Then (oh no!) I remember something I promised to do last weekend and forgot. Should I do it now? Can it wait until tomorrow? Later I get a call asking me to write a reference for an ex-colleague, 'today if possible'. I take a break to go shopping, buying ingredients for the youth group cake sale.
>
> What am I reflecting on here: being a youth worker, being a research student, being a busy person who tries to fit too much in? Do most part-time and volunteer youth workers have constant emails and calls and thoughts about work, or do they turn up at the youth club and go home at the end of the night, 'job done'? Are my conflicts of priority a sign of bad time management, or are they specific to combining work and study? Or might they tell me something about being a part-time youth worker?
>
> (Research diary, April 2012)

This is an example of writing that is not an observational recording as such but reflects on my youth worker identity, focusing on my own experience and feelings and 'treating the self as a unit of analysis' (Coffey, 1999, p.123). Such auto-ethnographic writing is something I feel ambivalent about, cautious of giving too much weight to my own experience and yet strongly agreeing with researchers and activists from various critical traditions that self-understanding is an important aspect of developing wider societal and political understandings. As Gramsci (1971, p.324) wrote,

> The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory.

For many feminist researchers, too, the inclusion of personal reflection is a political decision – as well as avoiding any pretence of neutrality and disinterest, this enables the inclusion and valuing of women's experiences that may previously have been seen as unimportant (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1990; Stacey, 1988; Stanley, 1993). Post-modernists dispute 'outsider' models of ethnography, and an increasing number reflect on sociological and anthropological concepts through the lens of their own experiences or by blurring fact and fiction (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Lather, 2000). Auto-ethnography, the study of one's own experiences, can demonstrate detailed and careful thought about personal experience in the context of research issues, bringing particular insight and consideration of ethics (see for example, Chaudhry, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Rambo Ronai, 1992**).** However, as Coffey (1999) points out, 'the boundaries between self-indulgence and reflexivity are fragile and blurred. There will always be the question about how much of ourselves to

reveal' (p.132). I feel conscious when reading or writing auto-ethnographic passages that there is a 'confessional' effect that appears honest and authentic while also being artfully constructed. This can be illuminating and yet might also serve to hide or obscure, whether deliberately or not. As Salinger's (1963) character Buddy observes:

> A confessional passage has probably never been written that didn't stink a little of the writer's pride in having given up his pride. The thing to listen for, every time, with a public confessor, is what he's <u>not</u> confessing to. (p.65)

As this study focuses on *diverse* experiences of being a part-time and volunteer youth worker in England at the current time, I have attempted not to over-use my own experiences and reflections. I have reflected at length on my youth work experiences and emotional reactions in my research diary and while analysing and writing up, and yet relatively little of this is included in the finished thesis; I often find myself 'writing in and then crossing out autobiographical details of my own life' (Reay, 1996, p.445). This is probably a healthy process. I have found it inspiring to read other people's auto-ethnographic writing, and it has been useful in helping me to think through some of my methodological dilemmas, but I do not identify my work here as auto-ethnographic. I am more in tune with the idea of being a practitioner ethnographer who is inevitably and consciously involved in the practice I am writing about, without necessarily putting my own experiences at centre stage.

Ethics, anonymity and collective writing

> Walking around the new estate a young man came up to ask my colleague and I if we'd seen a younger girl - she was late home. We said no and told him we were youth workers and he started chatting with us, asking if we were involved in the youth club to be set up in a hut on the estate. We said no, we hadn't heard about it. He said, 'I don't see the point, we need something that lasts, not one-offs'.
>
> 'Like what?' we asked.
>
> 'Somewhere to play football. Open up the playground for the younger ones.'
>
> 'Well maybe we should try to tell someone, what do you think?'
>
> 'Yeah. Look, they have those signs up saying no ball games.'
>
> 'That's annoying, where are you meant to play?'
>
> 'Yeah exactly, we're only young once.'
>
> He told us about how he had been to meetings at the community centre, where adults 'just talked about wanting CCTV and police'. As we talked, the three of us walked around the estate together looking for the young girl (nobody seemed too worried). At some point we heard that she was found. We stood by the closed play area, sometimes joined by his siblings or younger kids, talking

> about politics, drugs, religion and racist policing. As we were leaving I overheard him tell a younger boy, 'They're youth workers. They're there for us.'
>
> (Research diary, May 2012)

Researchers writing about other people in the context of their own experience need to be particularly aware of the ethical implications of doing so and power relations involved (Tolich, 2010). In the light of this awareness, writing a relatively straightforward observational passage like the one above becomes controversial and complicated. Asking colleagues and young people (and potentially their parents and carers) for a blanket 'permission to observe' would be potentially coercive and disruptive, because they relate to me on the basis of professional and personal relationships I wish to maintain during and beyond the research period (Finch, 1984; Stacey, 1998). If I ask colleagues and young people whether I can write about specific things that happened at work they might feel pressurised to agree, either because of a formal power relationship (I might later write a colleague's college placement report or decide whether a young person is given a place on a trip) or because they might feel reluctant to damage my research (Sikes, 2012; Tolich, 2010). This is all the more true when confidentiality is limited; my place of work could be discovered with a few clicks of a mouse even if it were officially ‘anonymous’, and those who know my work might guess at the identity of the colleague, the estate and even perhaps the young man in the field note above.

For these reasons, even after gaining my colleagues’ agreement and gaining ethical approval I did not want to assume I had the right to use my workplace for research purposes (Erler, 2012); on the other hand, I am aware that being overly cautious can make ethnographic research less ‘natural’ and thus less useful for analysis (Whelan, 2012). I have developed a contextual ethical approach after discussion with colleagues and supervisors, which primarily means that I avoid writing about sensitive issues or anything that could expose young people or colleagues to risk of harm. When selecting diary excerpts for use in written work I am cautious, and always attempt to prioritise the well-being of those I work with. I have at times consulted colleagues, young people and supervisors if I am unsure, but I need to balance this ‘checking out’ process with the awareness that I cannot expect others to spend significant time discussing these issues; the responsibility for this study lies with me, so as an ethically reflective youth worker and researcher I err on the side of caution. The risk is that I omit from this study some

of the sensitive but important issues in my work. I have written anonymously in other contexts, but this would be difficult in a thesis! Instead I have restricted my research diary extracts to relatively low risk subjects, while including fictional vignettes at the beginning and end of Chapters 3 to 6 that sometimes allude to more sensitive issues (see the section on analysis and writing, from p.66).

After discussions with colleagues and an ethics board amendment I have de-anonymised Voice of Youth (VOY), the workers' co-operative where I have worked and volunteered over the past three years. In reality this organisation was never entirely anonymous anyway because I am publicly associated with it. When several of us set up VOY we wanted to try out more democratic and less bureaucratic ways of organising youth work, partly for the sake of young people and ourselves, and also with the intention of sharing our experiences with others. It felt counter-productive not to be able to write in public about our experiences. Non-anonymity can be particularly useful when those being researched are involved in challenging systems of injustice and oppression and *want* their stories to be told (Guenther, 2009; Apple & Beane, 1999).

Deciding not to be anonymous freed us to think about how to involve VOY in my PhD research. We discussed this at co-operative meetings and arranged a specific session where many creative ideas for writing about VOY were shared, inspired partly by an art book my colleague Fionn had made for an assignment on his youth and community work course. There was enthusiasm for writing something collectively, although we were worried about how little time we all had. We decided to audio record two discussions, one on our principles and one on any other issues that we wanted to think about, which we would then edit as a collectively written piece. As the person with most research time available I took overall responsibility for this, and others were welcome to get involved as much or as little as they wished. These discussions were not interviews as such so I have not included my colleagues in the 'research participants' descriptions above; instead they are named as co-writers of a significant section of Chapter 7. They were given the choice of whether to use pseudonyms for the purposes of the research, but all were keen to use their real names and to be credited for their involvement in writing the section. Seven people were involved in the discussion on principles (Anna-Nina Koduah, Carys Afoko, Emma Heard, Fionn Greig, Keishaun Decordova, Julia

Betancour Roth and myself) and four in the follow-up discussion (Anna-Nina, Fionn, Julia and I). I will discuss this process further in Chapter 7.

In elaborating my approach to practitioner ethnography here it has been particularly important to think carefully about its dilemmas and challenges; perhaps in doing so I have not given enough space to its positive potential. My ongoing engagement in youth work practice has been an integral aspect of this study. Practitioner ethnographers have advantages in terms of access, grounded knowledge, shared understandings, and rapport with potential research participants (Barton, 2008). In addition, we are likely to have a deeper, longer and broader engagement with our research setting than most other ethnographers. During my research I have worked with hundreds of young people, some of whom I have known well for years and others I have only just met; taken part in and facilitated meetings, training and supervision; worked on the streets, in parks, on housing estates and in community halls; been incredibly busy and wasted time; worked alongside and learnt from many different colleagues; helped facilitate drama, art, sports, games, more than twenty day trips, and two residential weekends; had fun, been bored; felt happy and sad; filled in a *lot* of forms; and, perhaps most of all, taken part in thousands of conversations with young people and with colleagues. This is the stuff of youth work, and I am certain that my research is richer for my everyday involvement in practice.

Activist scholarship

In this section I want to explore the theoretical and political underpinnings of the study's methodology. Rather than adopting an overall theoretical framework I have drawn on a number of critical theoretical traditions; however, it is also relevant to explore how my understanding of the world and therefore my approach to research is firmly rooted in my involvement with youth work and with activism, both of which started when I was a teenager and developed into long-term commitments. As I learn to be a researcher it seems natural to adapt what I know and believe from youth work and politics to the research setting. For a time I was not entirely conscious that this is what I was doing or, at least, I did not feel confident that this was a valid approach that I could justify or articulate. I had an impression that novice researchers should 'pick' a theoretical and

methodological framework as if from a menu. It seemed foolish and arrogant not to do so, but I could not understand how it was meant to happen; the choice felt rather unreal and arbitrary.

I want to attempt to be authentic when writing about my methodology and its theoretical basis, which means being self-conscious about the most central influences on my research. By emphasising my political and practice influences I do not wish to underestimate the influence of theoretical and methodological writing, which has inspired and enabled me to transform practical and political knowledge into a research approach. Neither do I mean to argue that *all* research should be connected to the worlds of practice and political action; I simply want to make explicit these influences in my own research. What I will try to do here is explore how the productive and sometimes contradictory relationship between practice, activism and research is at the heart of my overall methodology. In doing so I tentatively and questioningly engage with the term activist scholarship which refers to orientations to research that involve active engagement and collaboration with groups in struggle (Lipman 2011; Hale 2008; Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010).

Becoming an anarchist

The way I understand and live in the world today is fundamentally shaped by my deep involvement as a younger woman in decentralised social and environmental direct action groups, which began by accident when I lived on the route of a controversial road development (Arbib, 2009). As a result I spent my early adulthood taking part in protests every day, living in squats, on protest camps or on people's floors. At around the same time I became involved in youth work and play work, first as a volunteer and then as a paid part-time worker. It was a way of earning enough to live on (and getting off the dole) so I could maintain my involvement in political action, and I found it personally and politically rewarding in its own right. Playing, chatting and hanging out with children and young people with no particular agenda provided a grounding contrast to my often manic activism. At times, however, I felt I was juggling two demanding lives, spending mornings running around organising political things, afternoons at the playscheme, evenings at youth projects or activist meetings, weekends and annual leave on actions, protest camps, or going to court. Over a decade this lifestyle took its toll; I

have enormous respect for those who integrate their activism with work, family and rest over the long term, but I rarely found a balance. Without making any conscious decision I became less intensely involved in activism, although I continued to believe in the same things and to be politically active through my work, writing and community involvements.

The political life I discovered as a young activist is a version of anarchism involving the values *and practice* of freedom, equality and solidarity. My political awareness did not come from books but rather from the daily experience of collective organising, living and action. We made attempts at direct resistance and challenge to the state and big business and, perhaps more successfully, we educated and organised ourselves without formal hierarchies. We were creating the change we wanted to see in the world, rather than making demands or asking those in power to change things for us. We made decisions through consensus, questioned everything, challenged formal and informal leadership structures, cared for and loved each other, met and talked endlessly, were inspired by activists from previous generations and other places, and created our own ways of living. By no means was it perfect or idyllic, but this kind of practical anarchism remains the closest thing I have to a belief system and infuses my life and work today.

The anarchism that influences this research is largely ‘anarchism in practice rather than in theory’ (Roth, 2014, p.303; Ward, 1973; Burke & Jones, 2014). Practical anarchism is consistent with my approach to youth work, for example when I work with colleagues and young people to make collective decisions without formal leadership structures, to take thoughtful action in our neighbourhoods and wider world, and to combine care, question and challenge. In turn, youth work informs my politics, making me more committed to taking people's different lived experiences and priorities into account, more conscious of inequalities and informal hierarchies, and more open-minded about how the world should be and how we might get there. Both youth work and anarchist activism now inform me as I learn to be a researcher, while theory and research methodologies have begun to influence my youth work practice and clarify my political beliefs. I summarise these relationships in table 4 below.

Table 4: Mutually enriching relationships between practice, research and activism

	How does youth work practice influence and inform...	**How do research theories and methodologies influence and inform...**	**How does activism influence and inform...**
… my youth work role?	Learning from colleagues. Critical reflection on own practice.	Understanding wider context for individual / local issues. Questioning taken-for-granted practices.	Political context of everyday life. People working together at the grassroots can change things.
… my research practice?	Open-minded, open-ended, improvisational and conversational approaches. Concern with relevance to practitioners and listening to practice perspectives.	Building on the accumulated knowledge and experience of other researchers. Awareness of researcher reflexivity and situated ethics.	Understanding how things are now and also how they might change. Focus on diverse forms of resistance (and lack of resistance).
… my political principles and actions?	Knowing and working with a variety of people. Awareness of how inequalities work even within apparently progressive groups.	Ways to articulate my beliefs and understand them more deeply. Combining strong political commitment with openness to challenge.	Creating the change we want to see in the world, rather than asking for change from above. Solidarity with other struggles.

Dilemmas in activist scholarship

Activist scholars tend to be academics who align with groups in struggle against dominant norms and ideologies, and contribute to public conversations about theory and practice (Lipman, 2011; Hale, 2008; Pulido, 2008; Calhoun, 2008; Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). I value their emphasis on the active alignment between learning, research, teaching and political struggle, enacting the classic principle that the point is not only to study the world but also to change it (Marx, 1845). The similar term, public sociology, tends to refer both to academics who have become politically involved through their research activities, and to those who study to support a prior political

commitment (Burawoy, 2004; 2009; Bailey, 2014). I am in the latter category; struggle was and remains a political choice, and like bell hooks (1994, p.59) 'I came to theory because I was hurting... wanting to comprehend'. I went to university as a mature student because I was desperate to make sense of why the youth work I loved was becoming something I couldn't believe in any more.

What might activist scholarship look like in practice? To give an example, Pauline Lipman (2011) discusses some elements of her work as a scholar activist: collaborating on research with community organisations; making evidence available to campaign groups; contributing to broad public conversations; negotiating boundaries of race, gender and difference; bringing 'invisible' issues to light; and putting aside her researcher role where human or political considerations are more important. I hope to engage in research in some of these ways as I continue to learn and develop as a researcher. Pauline Lipman writes too about the importance of humility, of being deeply informed by the people with whom she works in solidarity and influenced by the theories and analyses of people who are most affected by policy decisions but are least heard and involved. I am lucky to have worked alongside Pauline for a month during my PhD, and was greatly inspired to see these written intentions carried out in action; not only by Pauline herself but also by many of her students and colleagues. None were 'outsider' researchers or maverick academics looking to improve their own reputations; they were collectively engaged in struggles for public and critical education, and it was often difficult to see where the boundaries were between activism, research and learning.

Perhaps because I was an activist long before going to university, I identify with concepts of activist scholarship and public sociology while also feeling uncomfortable with them. I wonder if the identity or category 'activist scholar' might privilege certain forms of politically engaged scholarship over others; after all, many academics approach their teaching or research with political principles without calling themselves activist scholars, and activists are themselves engaged in the interpretation and creation of theory outside of the academy (Bevington and Dixon 2005). As the Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010, p.250) asks, does the term activist scholarship imply that activists need academics who are in some ways 'specially placed to assist the social and

political struggles of others'? Celebrating the activist scholar might lend status to those from the relatively protected world of the university over activists from outside of the academy, give academics an undue influence on movements, or salve the consciences of those (like myself) who have become tired or burned out from everyday involvement in more risky political struggle. There is also the problem of the politics themselves. The term 'activist scholar' does not automatically imply any particular political affiliation (Pimpare, 2012); on a structural level academics are relatively powerful, and there is a danger in the uncritical celebration of alignments between academics and community groups, which could be used to lend grassroots legitimacy to damaging research and vice versa. In addition, the individuality and reputation that are sometimes dominant in mainstream academia can clash (politically and culturally) with the anarchist and activist cultures of collectivity and anonymity.

This explains part of my reluctance to own the term 'activist scholar'. I also have some political and personal reservations about the word activist, despite its resonance for me. I tend to agree with X (2000) that, 'defining ourselves as activists means defining *our* actions as the ones which will bring about social change, thus disregarding the activity of thousands upon thousands of other non-activists' (p.160). Activism is an arena of power like any other, and can exclude; as Luu (2004, p.423) asks, 'who has the power to decide what is "radical" in the first place and who gets left out because of that definition?' As a full-time activist when I was younger I subtly disapproved of those who were not 'committed enough', a condescending attitude I am now embarrassed to admit to. On the other hand I am also embarrassed that I have become one of these 'less committed' people myself; I am still politically engaged, but on much less of an all-encompassing level. My younger self might not have seen my current self as an activist, and I am not sure how I feel about that. It does make me cautious in claiming to be an activist today.

The following relevant words were written by an activist and quoted by the researchers she is criticising:

> I am afraid I am uncomfortable with this situation. Firstly, with the idea of people capitalising on my unpaid activity for their own career development. Secondly, the creation of a class of highly paid activist/intellectuals who... are highly paid, mobile, powerful and following academic agendas. Thirdly, it is my experience that due to the level of commitment such people devote to their

> professional work, they are often less able to do the 'grunt work' required. (Kirsty, Indymedia posting, cited in Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010, p.251).

Here I recognise the perspectives of both the activist and the criticised researchers. I know that when I was a full-time activist myself I found activist academics annoying; the theory I found most inspiring and thought-provoking was contained in our own discussion papers, pamphlets about strategy and organising, our journals and newsletters, information about movements from the past and from other parts of the world, and the spoken discussions at our meetings and gatherings. Now I often fail to engage in important youth work campaigns and events because I am too busy doing a PhD, and I am sometimes doubtful about how useful my research might be to the groups to which I am politically committed. The irony is not lost on me. I did not embark on my studies for career reasons but, nevertheless, my options have been widened by my studies and I am often unsure whether I am using my new opportunities for the most effective purposes.

Despite my doubts, activist scholarship and public sociology are useful concepts both practically and personally because they name my attempts to combine study with an activist attitude towards youth work, and make explicit my learning from involvement in a youth work campaign (In Defence of Youth Work) and workers' co-operative (Voice of Youth) which overtly challenge neoliberal versions of youth work. For now, however, I use these labels with a degree of caution.

Politics, practice and theory

I have explained that my methodological approach to this study is shaped by my lived experience as an activist and youth worker. It is also influenced by engagement with a variety of critical theoretical traditions including poststructuralist feminism, critical race theory, Marxism, critical disability studies, queer theory and intersectionality. As Graeber (2004) explains, anarchists are rarely adherents to one particular thinker. I relate to this, and instead call on different critical theories where they are most relevant, engaging with their potential to help me develop deeper understandings. One advantage in using a variety of critical theoretical perspectives is that it helps me guard against entrenched thinking and brings new perspectives to bear. I realise that there could be a

danger here in applying theory inappropriately, and I try to be careful not to take theories out of context or without thinking about possible contradictions.

I am most attracted to theorists who combine strong anti-oppressive political principles with the ability to remain open to challenge, complexity and contradiction. Many of these are or were activists themselves, including Judith Butler, bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Stuart Hall, and Michel Foucault, as well as some of the (often anonymous) activist theorists who shaped my understanding and whose writings I have rediscovered or dimly remember. I am also informed by a rich vein of critical perspectives from writers, speakers and lecturers in the youth and community work field.

The influence of activist experience and anarchist values on my research methodology does not mean that I approach research with fixed interpretations of what I read or hear; rather the opposite. Adopting a fixed perspective would be antithetical to my commitment to understanding people's experiences and perspectives, and could obstruct any potential learning from youth workers who are active in creating their identities in what might be seen as hostile circumstances. This does not make me a moral relativist. My core (anarchist) principles, which could perhaps be expressed as freedom, equality, solidarity and care, are non-negotiable; but there is much here that remains open to question. Are these values meaningful, expressed in such vague terms? What do they mean when translated into the world of youth work practice? How do anarchist values both reinforce and contradict each other (Suissa, 2010)? What might they exclude or obscure?

As Judith Butler (2000, p.41) writes, 'The point ... is not then to answer these questions, but to permit them an opening, to provoke a political discourse that sustains the questions and shows how unknowing any democracy must be about its future'. In terms of this research, this means combining my political principles with a genuine regard for the perspectives of fellow grassroots youth workers, inviting them to challenge and develop my understanding, rather than using their words to illustrate or 'prove' something I want to believe to be true. As is often the case with tricky balancing acts, reflection is an essential part of this process:

> Because becoming a scholar activist entails making difficult choices and acts of courage – particularly the determination to live your truth – it is essential that

> you be attentive to your emotions and thoughts and consider how they affect your attitudes, values and behaviour. (Pulido, 2008: 362)

I started as a student by wanting to address my political concerns about specific elements of youth work policy that I felt were having a negative effect on practice. While I was thinking about how to formulate this into a research project, my supervisors mentioned that I could approach the subject from a more open perspective. This conversation was a bit of a light bulb moment; previously and through research methods classes I had held an idea of the researcher as scientist, testing a hypothesis, a model I had felt estranged from. In critical qualitative methodologies it is acceptable to be unclear about the directions the research might go in, and this feels strongly aligned to my political and youth work values. I chose the initial research question, 'how do grassroots youth workers experience their role?' because it is open, starts from practitioners' perspectives and has the potential to be a profoundly political question.

As a youth worker, activist and researcher, then, I try to question my assumptions and 'live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing it down too quickly' (Butler in Olson & Worsham, 2000). None of this means that I am a blank slate with no preconceptions; being open to question is part of my politics rather than being antithetical to them. It would be too easy to hide behind notions of open-ended practice and say, 'I just listen to the research participants,' as if I have no view myself. As the author of this research, it is important that I acknowledge my perspectives, influences, values and positioning, and think about how these influence the research (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2006). This methodology chapter is only part of my attempt to do so; reflexivity has been (and remains) an ongoing process throughout the research. For me this has been best supported by keeping a research journal and through supervision. Having access to experienced and supportive researchers as supervisors is a privilege and a pleasure, made all the more valuable because it is a space where I can reflect and be uncertain. In both youth work and research, a combination of reflective writing and conversation can be a process of rehearsing ideas and practising the craft elements of the role in order to be free to try different ideas and follow creative paths. Inspired by the live improvised music I have enjoyed throughout this study, I feel that the ability and willingness to improvise is part of a conversational approach to research that allows it to be more open and democratic than if everything had been decided beforehand.

Analysis and writing

Approaches to analysis

I have taken a broadly ethnographic approach to analysing material from the interviews, discussion groups and my own practice. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue in relation to ethnography that analysis is not a distinct stage of research; it takes place at many different stages, and is not confined to formal processes such as coding. Rather than following a particular analytic scheme, I have used a collection of methods to build up deep familiarity with the research materials to develop understanding, find connections, generate ideas, identify uncertainties, explore tensions and make sense. Analysis in these terms does not mainly happen through the coding of transcripts; it can take place at any time, often during an interview, when transcribing, in conversation and supervision, or when drafting and redrafting a chapter.

This open-ended approach to analysis is made possible by the luxury of time I have had to do this study and its relatively small sample, so I have felt I am 'getting to know' the research participants as I listen to the recordings and read the transcripts. All the same, the materials or 'data' of the study are numerous. The finished interview and discussion group transcripts run to more than three hundred thousand words, and I have twelve notebooks containing hundreds of research diary entries. These transcripts and notebooks are the core literature of this study, and the act of transcribing and diary-keeping has been one of my main analytical tools. I have not experienced transcribing as a technical task that happens prior to analysis; it involves great attention, detailed listening and judgement and is a way of building deep familiarity (Charmaz, 2006; Oakley, 1990). I did not want to turn the interviews into disembodied 'data' which lose their contextual meaning or their particular tone, and I attempted to record hesitations, laughter, interruptions, emphases and different ways of speaking, balancing these with the importance of making the transcripts readable. I found it thought-provoking to listen in detail to what was said and how it was said, and kept a notebook near me while transcribing to jot down questions and ideas.

My written records and reflections on youth work sessions were sometimes written carefully and thoughtfully but at other times they were rushed, sketchy or vague. Often I was tired or lacked clarity over what I was recording – and yet I wrote anyway, because I did not want to make notes only when I felt clear about what I had been doing, or had the energy to write precisely. Where possible I engaged in some initial analysis on these recordings soon after writing them by asking and answering questions about what had happened (Lareau, 1996); at other times I scribbled something quickly and put it aside to think about later. I tried many different approaches to writing field notes, including detailed observational accounts, critical reflections, diagrams and sketch maps, hastily written notes, and considered thoughts on a particular issue or problem. Many of these have stayed in the form of messy and barely grammatical handwriting, while others I typed up and edited to clarify my thoughts. Like the interview transcripts, I have only been able to include a small proportion of these diary excerpts in the thesis. In both cases, what is not included here has often still influenced the content and argument of the thesis directly and indirectly, in ways that I have tried to make visible where possible.

Throughout the research I continued to familiarise and re-familiarise myself with the interviews, transcripts and diary entries through careful reading and re-reading, listening and re-listening, looking out for rich, descriptive content, narrative insights and overall themes. In the early stages of the research I used line-by-line coding of interviews and field notes to learn the habits of close reading and attention to detail. As my research progressed I moved to a more open, instinctive and creative form of analysis, thinking in concepts, themes and narratives rather than codes (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). For issues that seemed particularly important, interesting or puzzling I wrote and rewrote short pieces, known in grounded theory as memos. Memos might be written in response to a single interview or research diary excerpt, and are revisited later if other material (from the research or the literature) seems to confirm, question or contradict their ideas. In grounded theory, memos:

> start in bits and pieces and patterns of ideas that may lack coherence and connection. As incipient ideas are recorded and explored through the memoing process, they grow in complexity and association. (Lambert, 2007, p.249)

This was resonant of analysis as a whole; as the research materials built up, I began to listen and feel for commonalities and contradictions, similar experiences and unusual stories. Thematic coding was useful at the beginning (when I had only a small amount of material) and towards the end (when I was writing specific chapters) and at those times I used coloured pens to group material relevant to particular themes. However, this strategy worked less well for the middle stages of the research, when I wanted to keep open the question of what the themes might be and how they might relate to each other. At this point, writing was my primary method of analysis: as well as memos, I wrote short fictional pieces and drew mind maps, coloured diagrammatic representations of the linkages between themes. I aimed to consider each piece of material in depth in its own right while also seeing its connections with other elements (Chase, 2005). Sometimes this flexible and creative analytic approach seemed to work well; at other times the weight of information was overwhelming and it was difficult to see my way through. I tried to see analytic difficulty as productive even if it was frustrating and slowed me down. Perhaps it has become a cliché to emphasise messiness in the research process, but it is one I find useful; living with doubt and uncertainty is one of the main lessons I have learned as a novice researcher!

Writing

Having time to write has been one of the joys of doing a PhD. I loved writing as a child, although I wrote less and less as I got older. I started writing again in my mid-twenties when I went to Manchester University's continuing education department to study part-time for a Diploma in Community and Youth Work. The course valued critical reflection on practice above academic convention, and writing became a joyful – if difficult - process of thinking and learning. It was then a few years before I did my degree and learned to write more academically, but I still feel very much influenced by the experience in Manchester of regular critically reflective writing. Reading fiction and journalism has remained important to me throughout my life, and I am sure that my writing is influenced by these forms as well as by academic writing.

I write rather slowly, with a great deal of re-drafting, re-structuring and editing. I usually start with a mixture of obvious, clichéd and self-indulgent nonsense which is (hopefully) edited out as I make sense of what I am writing about. I have approached

each chapter as its own mini-project inspired by the interplay of interviews and practice with policy and theory. I avoided writing a stand-alone literature review (other than briefly in the introduction) as I felt it would not represent the ethos of this research which is open-ended and rooted in the perspectives of grassroots youth workers. I preferred to interweave literature throughout the chapters, moving closely between theory and practice.

The writing process, like all aspects of research, involves ethical decisions, and respecting and valuing research participants. I gave participants a pseudonym of their choice so they would recognise and identify with themselves in finished writing, and many seemed to enjoy choosing their ‘false name’. Some named themselves after relatives or heroes, one asked a young person at work to choose him a name, and another emailed weeks later to change his name for another he liked more. Of course, naming is not enough: they will only 'see themselves' in my writing if I engage fully and respectfully with what they have said rather than ‘decorate’ my work with their words. On the rare occasions that I have been critical of participants' actions or decisions I have thought carefully about fairness and respect; I have also discussed such passages with my supervisors, although I am aware that these safeguards would not always prevent a person from feeling misrepresented or aggrieved.

I have included a series of fictional vignettes in shaded boxes at the beginning and end of Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. In using fiction I am inspired by critical race theorists, feminists, sociologists and educationalists who use creative writing to communicate complex issues (Gillborn, 2008, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Clough, 2002; Khan, 2013; Richardson, 2003; Bloor, 2013). Creative fictional writing can protect anonymity while honouring 'the rawness of real happenings' (Clough, 2002, p.8), something I have found particularly useful as a practitioner researcher. However, one disadvantage is that the reader does not know how the fiction relates to truth or reality. One person who read my attempts at fiction responded, 'This is interesting, but did it really happen?' The straightforward answer in my case is 'No'. My fictional characters are not based on any real person or composite of people; the incidents are invented, and the dialogue is made up. Although it may be appropriate in some research projects to semi-fictionalise a real person or event, I feel it would be wrong for me to use fiction in this way because

readers might guess (perhaps wrongly) who or what it is 'really' about. On the other hand, it would hardly be illuminating to include fiction that has no elements of 'truth', and the fictional passages I have included here draw on some common experiences and emotions of youth work and of being a young person.

Conclusion: Becoming a researcher

In this chapter I have attempted to write authentically about my research choices, making explicit the ways in which these are influenced by my experience as a youth worker and activist, as well as being informed by theory and research. I have tentatively followed an activist scholarship approach and explained how my methods draw on political values and actions, principled practice and research knowledge. It will always be important to reflect on the inherent contradictions in my research methodology, and to question myself rather than being complacent about my values, methods and findings. Such questioning is my ethical responsibility, and is somewhat safeguarded by my participation in communities of scholars, activists and practitioners who are very likely to challenge me and hold me to account in different ways.

As I gain experience as a researcher I become more confident in open-ended forms of enquiry. I see it as a worthwhile challenge to combine an open approach with strongly held political principles, a challenge I have also been practising for years as a youth worker. By being open to and thoughtful about the questions of other researchers, practitioners and young people, I hope to become a better researcher, youth worker and activist in ways that are consistent with my values while extending them. More importantly, I hope that this research will contribute to improved understandings of grassroots youth work in these times of great challenge and change.

Chapter 3
If you're not a success, it's your own fault: Entrepreneurial youth work in the Big Society

One warm summer evening...

A few young men take turns kicking a ball against a wall, sometimes calling out a joke or insult to each other. They see two adults walk towards them and greet them with calls of 'Alright Ricky? Alright Jo?' The youth workers join the haphazard game; news is shared and familiar stories retold of things they've all done together in the past and funny things that happened. The ball narrowly misses an older man walking past but he doesn't seem to notice, continuing unsteadily on his way. 'Urgh, he's disgusting,' says one of the young men, 'he sleeps at the bus stop next to my nan's.' Some of the group members laugh or stare. Jo says quickly, 'Shush Danny, he might hear you. If he's homeless or something then his life's hard enough without people being unkind'. 'Well tough. It's like my uncle says,' Danny responds, louder. 'If someone's not a success in life it's their own fault.'

A couple of the group nod and mutter agreement. Wondering how much to share, Ricky says tentatively, 'My mate was homeless when he was younger. I don't reckon it was his fault, he had a lot of bad luck.' Familiar with the youth workers' ability to get a good chat going, the young men start to gather round. Eventually the ball is left lying in the gutter as they talk about people they know and things they've read in the papers, about poverty, relationship breakdown and illness, discussing and disagreeing about how much choice they'll have themselves over what might happen to them in the future. After a while some of the group seem to lose interest, going round the corner to smoke. Looking straight at Jo, Danny says, 'Maybe it's not that guy's fault but whatever, he stinks, he should at least get a wash!' The remaining members of the group laugh as Danny kicks the ball high in the air and the game is resumed. Not joining in with the laughter, Ricky and Jo glance at each other, noticing that the moment has passed. They'll bring this up again another time.

> There are the things you do because it's your duty. Sometimes unpopular - but you do them because it is in the national interest. And yes, cutting the deficit falls into that camp. But there are the things you do because it's your passion. The things that fire you up in the morning, that drive you, that you truly believe will make a real difference to the country you love. And my great passion is building the Big Society. (Cameron, 2010)

The Big Society was launched by Prime Minister David Cameron with some optimism and a dose of nationalist pride as a plan to strengthen local neighbourhood groups, volunteering and social enterprise (Conservative Party, 2010a). The idea met with widespread indifference and scepticism: in large-scale surveys, nearly two thirds of people saw it as a smokescreen for cuts (Anderson, 2011), only 9% thought its aims would be achieved, and 39% thought the Government should drop the idea altogether (Hudson, 2011). The Big Society initiative today is said to be 'in tatters' as its charity (the Big Society Network) was wound up amid allegations of funding misuse (Wright, 2014a; 2014b). So why write about the Big Society at all?

As a clear expression of the government's desire to move local services from the public to private and voluntary sectors, the Big Society provides a useful banner under which to examine how current policy affects grassroots youth work. Under the Big Society, massive spending cuts have caused decades-old public and voluntary sector organisations to close or drastically reduce their services, leaving gaps in the lives of young people and communities. More subtle a change but perhaps even more significant is the intensification of neoliberal market-led ideologies in youth work or, to put it another way, the growth of entrepreneurial youth work. Amongst this there are more hopeful stories, of resistance by young people and youth workers (Davies, 2013, pp.24-6), of critical youth work that engages creatively with difference and prefigures democratic approaches to education (Batsleer, 2013a), and of the continued survival of everyday improvised youth work based on voluntary relationships (IDYW, 2011). Overwhelmingly, though, youth work policy in England (and in many other places) is now dominated by the structural consequences of neoliberalism: 'the individualisation of everyone, the privatisation of public troubles and the requirement to make competitive choices at every turn' (Hall & O'Shea, 2013, p.12).

As Wacquant (2013, p.1) points out, neoliberalism ‘is not the coming of King Market, as the ideology of neoliberalism would have us believe, but the building of a particular kind of state… it is a political project of market-conforming state-crafting’. Under neoliberal logic, the idea of welfare as a universal good has given way to a very different image of benefit cheats and feckless people avoiding a hard day's work. Politicians celebrate 'hard-working families' and demonise 'scroungers', contrasting the 'deserving strivers' with the 'undeserving skivers' (Williams, 2013). Such discourse is a deliberate strategy on the part of the state to shape public opinion, and moves with ease from policy documents and political speeches to public discourse through the media and on the street corner (Hall & O'Shea, 2013). In the fictionalised vignette above, I borrowed Danny's phrase 'If someone is not a success in life it's their own fault' from the government-commissioned evaluation of the coalition’s National Citizen Service (NatCen, 2012, p.37). The proportion of young people agreeing with this statement *increased* after they had taken part in the 2011 NCS, a result that the evaluators see as 'encouraging' evidence of young people's feelings of control over their lives (ibid). An alternative reading might point out that the statement locates responsibility with the individual, neglects social context, blames vulnerable people for their problems, and lacks any sense that categories of failure and success are inevitably problematic.[9]

The rhetoric of enterprise tells us that we can all be successful if we knuckle down, take risks, network, improve ourselves and aim for the top; the implicit message is that we have only ourselves to blame if anything goes wrong. This logic pathologises individuals, families, neighbourhoods, trade unions and social groups. It is used against workers and local authorities, for example when government minister Nick Hurd justified cuts to youth services by saying that some of them were ‘ok to lose’ because they were 'crap' (Hayes, 2013). In contrast, 'good' modern youth workers are imagined as enterprising subjects who compete for contracts, and inspire young people with dreams of ‘making it’ as an entrepreneur. Neoliberalism is both 'in here' and 'out there' (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p.383), seeping into our everyday lives:

[9] I first made this argument in a short piece for the In Defence of Youth Work blog (de St Croix, 2012). For the following year's evaluation the word 'usually' was added so it read, 'If someone is not a success in life it's usually their own fault'. Interestingly, the impact of the NCS programme in this area was 'not sustained' (NatCen, 2013, p.35). The statement has been dropped altogether from the most recent evaluation (Booth et al, 2014); nevertheless, it remains a clue to taken-for-granted thinking amongst policy makers and evaluators, particularly as it echoes similarly ideologically loaded evaluation tools from a previous evaluation of the pilot NCS (see de St Croix, 2011, pp.52-3; IRL, 2010, pp.7-9).

> This works by neo-liberalising us, by making us enterprising and responsible, by offering us the opportunity to succeed, and by making us guilty if we do not – by making us into neo-liberal subjects enmeshed in the 'powers of freedom'. This happens not primarily through oppressions but through anxieties and opportunities, not by constraints but by incitement and measurement and comparison. This happens in mundane ways as we work on ourselves and others in conditions of 'well-regulated liberty' (Ball, 2012, p.145; drawing on Rose, 1999, p.73).

Neoliberal governance can be understood in Foucaultian terms as the 'powers of freedom' and in Gramscian terms as a process of consent, coercion and resistance (Lipman, 2013). Both of these frameworks are useful here. The anxieties, opportunities, incitement, measurement and comparison emphasised by Ball, above, are conspicuous in the accounts of workers in my study and in my own practice experience. Constraints are clearly there as well, and might play more than a limited role in creating us as responsible entrepreneurs. Oppressions are all too apparent when the poorest bear the largest share of cuts (Duffy, 2014); when disproportionately heavy policing and sentencing is used against protesters and rioters (Cooper, 2012); when youth clubs in working-class and ethnically diverse areas are closed (Pidd, 2013); and when grassroots youth workers are poorly paid and precariously employed.

This chapter explores both 'freedoms' and constraints in the Big Society, blending policy analysis with a focus on the everyday working lives of grassroots youth workers. The first part is a policy analysis, which argues that the ideology of neoliberalism and the promise of enterprise have come to dominate youth work under the rhetoric and mechanisms of the Big Society. The second part draws on data from my research to explore four of the positions taken up (willingly or less willingly) by youth workers in this policy context: protesting against youth service cuts, setting up social enterprises, working in precarious circumstances and engaging in entrepreneurial forms of volunteering. The conclusion reflects on whether and how it is possible for youth workers to be 'in and against' the market.

Creating the youth work market

> Devon County Council is considering slashing its youth service budget by nearly £1m. The youth service, which costs £3.7m a year and employs 114 staff, could also lose 60 jobs, says a council report. The council's 34 youth centres could be outsourced to community and voluntary groups. The council said in a statement the 'fundamental change' in the youth service was 'aimed at early help and prevention... This targeted approach means the county council would no longer manage or run more traditional centre-based activities aimed at universal support for all youngsters.' (BBC, 2014)
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> It was a 'sad day for democracy' as young people were stopped from speaking at Devon County Council's budget meeting yesterday, a North Devon councillor said... The group was left downtrodden when councillors voted against them having their say. They were there protesting against a consultation which is proposing to close 34 youth centres across Devon. (North Devon Journal, 2014)

When the Coalition Government took office in 2010, most local authorities had their own in-house youth services that provided youth centres and street-based projects, coordinated structured youth support services and played a role of supporting local voluntary sector youth work. Most of these local authority youth services were formed after the 1960 Albemarle Report, or earlier in response to a government circular during the second world war (Board of Education, 1939; Ministry of Education, 1960), and had survived for decades (Davies, 1999a; 1999b; 2008). In five short years of Coalition Government, many of these services have been dissolved or changed beyond recognition.

By 2011, 96% of youth service heads said that their youth club activity would be reduced or stopped altogether (Williams, 2011). More recently, a fifth of councils said they planned to close *all* of their clubs or transfer them to external providers (Pidd, 2013) and 80% predicted that little or none of their youth service budget would be spent on open access youth work within three years (Cabinet Office, 2014). Surveys have estimated the average cut to youth services at between 27% (Hilling, 2014) and 36% (Barton & Edgington, 2014). 10% of those surveyed by the government this year now have no youth service team whatsoever (Cabinet Office, 2014).

In this context, neighbourhood youth clubs have often been the first to go (Spence & Wood, 2011; Pidd, 2013). Some councils have contracted out entire youth services to private or large voluntary providers, while others – like the Devon example quoted

above - are disposing of their open access provision while (at least initially) keeping targeted youth support in-house. Anti-oppressive projects working with young women and black, disabled and LGBT young people are particularly vulnerable; often working with small groups and led by young people's rather than adults' agendas, these are perhaps less likely to be profitable in a market system. The youth work that survives will need to prove itself to be in the financial or social interests of investors (whether state, private or charitable). Once profitable they become attractive to a 'shadow state' made up of large corporate charities and private outsourcing companies who are able to outbid and undercut local state and voluntary sector providers (Ball, 2012; Williams, 2012; Bell, Gray & Marron, 2013).

Despite the dramatic nature of these changes, Coalition policy represents continuity as well as change (Ball, 2008a). The celebration of enterprise was presented as an economic necessity by the 1980s Thatcher administration (MacDonald, 2013), and youth workers at that time were funded by employment creation schemes to contribute to the 'construction of the respectable, patriarchal, entrepreneurial subject' (Hall, 1988, p.8; see also Ingram, 1987). From 1997, New Labour continued the Conservative Party's post-welfare project of aligning policy with capitalist values, albeit with some added social democratic elements (Gewirtz, 2002). In youth work settings this meant more funds but also an increase in individualised, short-term and 'diversionary' youth work to the detriment of open access clubs, girls work and anti-racist projects (Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010; IDYW, 2009; 2011). Private companies began to enter the field, providing services such as data management and even running youth projects, and charities and local authorities increasingly adopted business methods and attitudes.

Today's neoliberal influences on youth work, then, can be traced back at least to the last Conservative Government three decades ago and continued (albeit in a different form) under New Labour. Neoliberalism is a complex and contested concept, which can be summed up as an almost religious ideology in which 'what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad' (Apple, 2001, p.38; Apple, 2013). In practice neoliberalism is not always as straightforward as this suggests; its precise contours vary in place and time and it is 'neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect' (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p.384). Seen from a western context, neoliberalism seems to have

achieved hegemonic status as ‘the only game in town’. Its success is underpinned by a broad-based alliance of pro-market, traditional conservative authoritarian and managerialist interests, with a minimum of social democracy thrown in to retain widespread consent (Apple, 2006; Gewirtz, 2002; Hall, 1988).

Emphasising maximum market freedom and low taxation, neoliberalism is often associated with a small state, but small does not necessarily mean weak. As Wacquant (2013) argues, neoliberalism entails ‘the construction of a strong state capable of effectively countering social recalcitrance to commodification and of culturally shaping subjectivities conforming to it’ (p.8). Neoliberal states play a vital role in creating the conditions for capitalism, acting as 'regulator and market-maker' (Ball, 2012, p.15) while ensuring strong social control through policing, prisons, border control, surveillance, anti-protest laws and the military. These authoritarian elements of the state are often themselves created as markets (Davis, 2003; 2005), and policy-making is also an opportunity for profit (Ball, 2012). For example, management consultancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006) has played a key role in youth policy by recommending the outsourcing of youth services. Through such changes the state becomes smaller and 'at the same time more extensive, intrusive, surveillant and centred' (Ball, 2008a, p.202).

In the field of education, the neoliberal state is most interested in the elements of its role that are directly beneficial for capital: training entrepreneurial and compliant workers, promoting and normalising entrepreneurial values and thinking amongst young people, and the outsourcing of providers and ancillary services for capital accumulation. New Labour's brand of neoliberal youth work was relatively well-funded but directed towards social control, made measurable and comparable through a system of outcomes and targets, and run by charities and local authorities organised as if they were businesses. Under the Coalition Government, a much reduced level of funding is targeted at nation-building (in the form of the National Citizen Service) and getting people into work. Projects are measured and rewarded on the basis of monetised outcomes, and private business has a growing role. Notwithstanding the continuities here, the Coalition Government has moved further and faster than New Labour in the structural and ideological privatisation of youth work. Whereas there was little or no private sector presence in youth services a decade ago (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006),

the market is now firmly embedded in both policy and discourse.

The words 'enterprising' and 'entrepreneurial' crop up repeatedly in policy documents, and youth workers are required to become skilled mediators and advocates of a market system. The government has told local authorities to commission out youth services rather than providing their own, and encourages employees 'to spin out into independent enterprises' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011b, p.17). In Kensington and Chelsea, for example, youth workers have avoided redundancy (for now) by agreeing to leave the local authority and set up a public service mutual; in return they have been guaranteed a level of funding for five years, after which they will be required to compete with other organisations (RBKC, 2014). Youth workers today must be 'entrepreneurial and responsive' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011b, p.17), able to 'articulate clearly to commissioners the impact of the services they provide and be enterprising in seeking opportunities to replicate their proven practice' (Department for Education, 2011, p.16). The extensive programme of cuts forms an almost hidden backdrop to these policy documents but serves in every case to justify and accelerate change.

Much of this change has been presented under the guise of the Big Society, launched by Prime Minister David Cameron soon after the election. The idea ostensibly focuses on volunteering and community activity, but is explicitly underpinned by the agenda that 'the state has become too big and is crowding out private sector interests' (Higham, 2014, p.122; see also Olmedo, 2013; NCIA, 2011; Dawson, 2013). While the rhetoric is of neighbours looking after their own services, the reality in most cases is that large businesses have benefited substantially from the Big Society while voluntary sector groups have lost out (Civil Exchange, 2012; 2013). Local authority youth services have been decimated – this has often been justified by the idea that volunteers will plug the gaps (Davies, 2014). This may not be a realistic aspiration, as M.G. Khan eloquently points out:

> Now, the Big Society volunteer is expected to run the youth centre, the library, the school, the hospital, the parish or ward council, the neighbourhood watch, as well as any housing association they may be connected to… But how many Big Society volunteers will come back to a youth club where they have been told, in no uncertain terms, to 'fuck off' the week before by a young person? (Khan, 2013, p.3).

Whether youth clubs are run by paid workers or volunteers, there has been a substantial shift in what a youth work organisation looks like and how it is constituted. Since the 1960s, the labels 'local authority youth service' or 'voluntary sector' have sufficed to categorise youth work organisations, but today they are almost redundant. The movement from public to private has created a growing number of overlapping categories, and the lines between these categories were often difficult to discern as I pursued my research:

> When I look at the websites of youth organisations it is often unclear whether they are charities or businesses, 'for profit' or 'not for profit'. They aim for branding that marks them out as unique, but they all look rather similar: professional logos, consistent colour schemes, and arty photographs of visibly 'diverse' groups of young people doing the kinds of activities you would see on a corporate team building day (often climbing, jumping or building something, presumably suggesting upward progress). Reading on, they all seem to do 'innovative' work with 'vulnerable' or 'disadvantaged' young people, and 'encourage them to succeed' by 'delivering programmes' focused on 'enterprise and employability'. There are sections on 'investment opportunities', 'corporate fundraising' and 'our youth enterprises'. There are headshots of 'our directors' (white men with snappy biographies emphasising their business credentials) and 'our team' (more managers than frontline staff). Whether charities or private companies, today's youth work organisations portray themselves as dynamic, forward-thinking and business-like.
>
> (Research diary, March 2014)

As Ball (2012, p.71) argues, 'Traditional lines and demarcations, public and private, market and state, are being breached and blended in all of this and are no longer useful analytically as free-standing descriptions'. Diversification is not neutral and the direction of travel is clearly from public to corporate. The government intends a greater role for private businesses and social investment and to this end is supporting 'improved brokerage' and a 'Youth Social Finance Retailer' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011b, p.14; Young Foundation, 2011).[10] Outsourcing giant Serco has become a dominant player through its involvement in the National Citizen Service (Puffett, 2012b), while large national charities have won contracts by undercutting established neighbourhood youth organisations (Bell, Gray & Marron, 2013; Spence,

[10] The Young Foundation (2011) were commissioned to 'assess the youth sector social market' (p.3), recommending the increased use of social finance. Social finance products include ' "soft" loans at sub-commercial rates or very long repayment terms; as well as riskier products that mimic equity, like loans with performance-related interest'. (Young Foundation, 2011, p.3).

2012; Davies, 2013). Charities are 'increasingly difficult to distinguish from the commercial enterprises whose forms and practices they have adopted' (Rochester, 2013, p.85): they merge and form consortia, spend large proportions of their income on managerial staff, institute target-setting and staff appraisal systems, compete for quality marks, and place face-to-face youth workers on lower wages and insecure contracts. These changes require a new language:

> Those who lead voluntary agencies became known as 'chief executives', their committees of management were increasingly referred to as 'boards', and, in an attempt to respond to calls for them to be more 'business-like', they increasingly saw themselves as businesses and their beneficiaries and funders as 'customers'. (Rochester, 2013, p.5)

In youth work, as in the wider education field, 'the boundaries between government and state, public and private, processes and results, common wealth and individual profit, charity and benefit, are made increasingly indistinguishable' (Olmedo, 2013, p.6). These developments are easily visible in the development of the National Citizen Service (NCS), a flagship policy of the Big Society. The scheme was presented as David Cameron's vision for a compulsory form of national service, inspired by his experiences at Eton where he took part in the cadets and visited elderly people (Winnett & Kirkup, 2010). Ideas to make the scheme compulsory and to link it more closely with the military remain (IDYW, 2013; Sparrow, 2010); in practice, however, it has so far taken the form of a short summer programme of team-building and social action for school leavers (Conservative Party, 2010b; NatCen, 2012; 2013; Booth et al, 2014). I know young people and workers who have enjoyed taking part, but once understood in its wider policy context the NCS represents an insidious attack on youth services. It has been criticised for its high per-person cost at a time of cuts to cheaper year-round provision for all young people (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011a; Hillier, 2013) and yet is cited by government ministers as proof of the government's support for young people and youth activities:

> We passionately believe in the value of youth services for young people. That is why we have developed the National Citizen Service, which has an evidence base to support the value that it gives to young people (Hurd, 2014; see also House of Commons Education Committee, 2011b).

The 'evidence base' mentioned here is a key point: it is an essential aspect of making

work with young people legible in the market. Using quantitative evaluation, social research company NatCen (2012; 2013) assessed statistically significant impact and used this to monetise the social value of the NCS, estimating it at between 1.5 to 2.8 times its cost. NatCen calculated this figure by adding up the 'value' of young people's volunteering at £3.68 per hour, and projected additional earnings as a result of increased confidence in teamwork, improved communication and leadership, and greater take-up of educational opportunities (NatCen, 2013, p.44). The inclusion of the latter, valued at up to £46.3 million, is somewhat perplexing because there is no statistically significant impact from the programme on the proportion of participants intending to study in the most recent evaluation (p.36), and neither was there evidence amongst the previous year's participants to show an increased uptake of educational opportunities (p.47). The claimed robustness of the financial justification for the NCS may perhaps be doubted.

However dubious the calculations, the monetised NCS becomes a market opportunity (Hillier, 2012a) and thus a mechanism for privatisation. Public sector youth services were not invited to tender for the NCS, and contracts were awarded only to private and voluntary sector organisations. The lead provider for the first two years was the Challenge Network which has strong links to the government's first Big Society advisor Nat Wei and was set up specifically for the purpose of running NCS schemes (Jozwiak, 2010; CYPN, 2010; Mahadeven, 2009; de St Croix, 2011). Although registered as a charity, the Challenge Network is led by corporate managers from companies including Poundland, McKinsey, Rio Tinto and Deloitte (Challenge Network, undated). The Challenge retained substantial contracts under the most recent round of contracts, but the largest number was won by a consortium led by the multi-million pound company Serco (Hillier, 2012b; Puffett, 2012b).

The involvement of private companies such as Serco in the NCS signals that youth services have become a potentially profitable market. Two thirds of Serco's international income comes from UK government contracts (NAO, 2013) but its activities are difficult to research because 'its contracts with government are subject to what's known as "commercial confidentiality" and as a private firm it's not open to Freedom of Information requests' (Harris, 2013). We do know, however, that it has been accused of beating refugees (Corporate Watch, 2012), fraudulently charging for

electronically tagging offenders who were dead or in prison (Farrell, 2014), locking up prisoners all day without exercise, and falsifying data for its GP management services (Harris, 2013).

A Social Enterprises UK survey found that 'The majority of people… have never heard of Atos or Serco, yet these firms and others like them, are receiving and are responsible for many billions of pounds of taxpayers' money' (Williams, 2012, p.6). The government spends £187 billion annually on private sector contractors (National Audit Office, 2013, p.8), much of which is spent with 'strategic suppliers' including Serco, Atos, Capita and Group 4. While Serco did not tender for the most recent round of NCS contracts, other private companies have been shortlisted (McCardle, 2014b). Unaccountable profit-making firms continue to dominate the UK's public sector even after numerous scandals, bringing the idea of democracy into question:

> A 'shadow state' is emerging, where a small number of companies have large and complex stakes in public service markets, and a great deal of control over how they work. Transparency and genuine accountability are lacking... It has left the Government buying services in a market and using contracts that are far too heavily weighted in favour of the companies they are buying from, and their shareholders. (Williams, 2012, p.5)

Services for young people have been made marketable through the disposal of unprofitable youth clubs and so-called 'crap' youth services and their replacement by the NCS and other programmes that can be converted into a calculable return on investment. As already noted, the direction of change is not new; local authorities and charities have been using business methods and moving from open access to targeted youth work for some years (IDYW, 2011; Davies, 2013; 2014). Neither has change been total: during my research I have encountered some local authorities and voluntary organisations that still value and develop youth clubs and emancipatory forms of youth work. However, recent years have seen a marked acceleration in market values and processes through the involvement of the profit-making private sector in youth work delivery, what Ball and Youdell (2007) refer to as exogenous privatisation. McGimpsey (2013) has argued that we are now in a phase of post-neoliberal youth work, characterised by a focus on the requirements of measureable returns on investment. Youth enterprise is part of this agenda (Biressi & Nunn, 2013), crudely illustrated by the government's partnership with Virgin Money which encourages primary school

children to start their own business with a five pound loan (DfBIS, 2014). Enterprise has now become the key word for the provision of public services:

> How do we make this country a really brilliant place for setting up a new charity, a new social enterprise, for opening up the provision of public services? ... It's actually enterprise, it's entrepreneurship that is going to make this agenda work. (Cameron, 2011)

The message seems to be that it does not matter who runs services as long as they are entrepreneurial! This message does not only come from central government; a very similar language is employed by Labour-dominated local authorities:

> Are you an entrepreneurial, commercially-minded service provider who understands young people and is interested in working with them to create exciting, new and innovative out-of-school opportunities to support their journey through adolescence and into successful adult life? Are you able to re-imagine the use of high quality, inspirational youth buildings for other commercial purposes...? ... The council will make available leases on its flagship buildings and will make available initial revenue funding for the provision of an offer for young people. (Islington Council, 2014)

While the language of business and investment are becoming dominant and perhaps hegemonic, the commodification of youth work is contested and opposed by some voices within youth work, notably those associated with the campaign network In Defence of Youth Work, the trade unions, the Choose Youth campaign, and local struggles (In Defence of Youth Work, 2011; Nicholls, 2012; Taylor, 2010; Choose Youth 2011; 2012). However, other youth work bodies have willingly embraced the market (Davies, 2013). The National Centre for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), an umbrella body for voluntary sector youth organisations, is coordinating efforts to establish a social finance retailer to pilot evidence-based social investment (Davies, 2014). More prosaically, NCVYS's allegiances are shown in the contents of its regular funding updates sent out to members: for example, a recent bulletin included information about bidding for a contract to run a prison, as well as information on funding from Starbucks and Virgin (NCVYS, 2014). Other voluntary youth organisations openly celebrate their relationships with Barclays (Taylor, 2012) and Microsoft (Puffett, 2012a).

The loss of funding for open access youth work reinforces inequalities. Youth clubs and street-based youth work were most often located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods both used and staffed predominantly by working-class and black and ethnic minority people. In many places these clubs have gone, leaving only a short and over-priced National Citizen Service summer programme for school leavers, and a range of social intervention projects run by private sector providers and 'empire-building national voluntary organisations' (Davies, 2013, p.14). These changes are underpinned by an individualising discourse of enterprise which exhorts youth workers and young people to be ambitious, to take risks, and to ignore structural inequalities and social context. As we have been told, we will get what we deserve - and if we do not succeed it's our own fault.

Grassroots youth work in the Big Society

The remainder of this chapter draws on material from interviews, discussion groups and my own involvement in youth work practice and activism to explore some of the positions taken up by grassroots youth workers in the Big Society. The market direction of youth work was not lost on the youth workers I interviewed, several of whom spoke critically about their organisations behaving like businesses, embodying business values, treating young people as money or numbers, and even looking like businesses. For example, one participant commented:

> I'm in a very corporate environment [...] It's young people friendly in terms of jazzy colours on the walls [...] but it still is a corporate building. You still walk past a receptionist to come in. […] It is not accessible after five if you don't have a fob. There's no intercom to the office so you have to have someone on the door, you know what I mean, it doesn't function as a youth club, it couldn't function as a youth club, so it's in an office environment which is – it's not the best, really. (Mark, voluntary sector youth worker)

The marketised direction of youth policy is clearly visible in the diverse settings I have visited, heard about and worked in during this study. Grassroots youth workers tend to be critical of these changes. However, Stephen Ball (2012) makes the point that educators are themselves re-created by policy change rather than existing only in response to it:

> We are 'reformed' by neo-liberalism, made into different kinds of educational workers... At its most visceral and intimate, neo-liberalism involves the

> transformation of social relations into calculabilities and exchanges, that is into the market form, and thus the commodification of educational practice... Neo-liberal technologies work on us to produce 'docile and productive'… bodies, and responsible and enterprising… selves. (p.29)

This does not mean that policy implementation is always entirely successful or that it goes unchallenged, as Ball himself argues elsewhere (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Neoliberalism can often seem to have permeated all of life, but hegemony is never final or uncontested (Hall, 1988; 2011). The workers in my study could be described as 'reluctantly implicated in the market' (Gewirtz, 2002, p.56); they overtly questioned the commodification of their work and of young people, even while being involved in it:

> Mickie: Young people have a monetary value, and it's like, 'How much can we stop them causing us to pay for things, so how much can we get a better return on our investment in these young people?'
> Arimas: It's a transaction, a business transaction.
> Nicola: (…) Even youth workers are doing it though, they're writing books going, 'It will cost you seven hundred and fifty pounds a year, for one person, in this (youth) service, or two thousand pound in prison.' Do you know what I mean? We're making them horrible comparisons!

Over the next pages I will explore four of the key Big Society positions taken up by youth workers - protesting, enterprising, working precariously, and volunteering – to explore how neoliberalism is created, experienced and resisted in local situations.

(1) Protesting

In some areas of the country young people and youth workers have come together with inspiring energy to oppose youth service cuts and closures (IDYW, 2009; 2010; 2011; Nicholls, 2012; Taylor, 2010; Choose Youth 2011; 2012). Organised protest was not a focus of this study and I did not set out deliberately to find youth work activists. However, a small number of those I interviewed had been involved in protest. Louise spoke about her particularly sustained involvement in a campaign to save her local youth service from closure when I interviewed her in 2011. As a volunteer she felt she had more freedom to protest than her paid colleagues, who had been warned off by management:

> In my head I think, ‘well I don’t have a contract and you’re not paying me, so really I could possibly bend the rules and it doesn’t really matter’. And at the moment there are a lot of things people are saying you shouldn’t do, like protesting for example, 'You shouldn't do this because you're a council employee'. And therefore they have been told if they are caught protesting in work time [...] then it can be classed as a disciplinary. […] So they've been told not to. They've also been told not to tell the young people. [...] Not get them involved in any of the protest because a lot of the young people have been coming to the protests. One youth club had leaflets, anti-cuts leaflets in their youth centre and a manager came and told them they had to take the leaflets away.

Louise's colleagues were not allowed in the council chamber when the cuts were debated, and were ordered not to get involved in the campaign or speak to the media, even in their own time. If it is representative of other youth services (and anecdotal evidence suggests that it probably is), Louise’s account helps to explain why protests against youth service cuts have been limited:

> They all had serious talkings to and because everyone's fighting for their jobs, it's kind of like, well, it's like blackmail isn't it? […] It got people scared I think.

On launching his Big Society agenda, Cameron (2010) said, 'We need to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them'. This seems inconsistent with threatening workers with disciplinary action if they attempt to be 'in charge of their own destiny', and especially with preventing workers from giving young people information which might enable them to 'shape the world around them'. Perhaps aspirations for ‘communities with oomph’ are aimed at *certain kinds* of neighbourhoods, and *particular forms* of community involvement. Louise told me about a nearby village where youth workers were *not* prevented from telling young people about the cuts:

> They're cycling and doing all this kind of stuff to raise money [...] There's a lot of important people that live in [village] that've got money, so they've got backing so they're lucky. Whereas other places like [social housing estate], well there's no funding, there's no rich people that live in [the estate] that are gonna say, 'Here's a big pot of money'. […] [The council] knew that there's people there with money that would sort it out and that the village will run it themselves, they knew that would happen and that's exactly what's happened.

Here, the wealthy village behaved as an exemplary Big Society community, raising money and finding volunteers to keep the youth club open. In the nearby poor and

ethnically diverse social housing estate, young people and residents were not informed about the proposed changes and thereby *prevented* from taking action. It is hardly surprising, then, that audits show that 'the Big Society is healthiest in affluent and rural communities' (Civil Exchange, 2013, p.8). Fundraising and volunteering are presented as the only legitimate response to cuts, whereas potential protestors are intimidated:

> I gather from local youth and community workers today that the protest outside Cameron's Witney office on Dec 10th is organised through a facebook group set up by a 12yr old young man who wanted to get his mates to support him in protesting peacefully about the closure of the youth club in his area... I'm told that police officers visited the young man this week at his school... They warned him that he would be held responsible if there was any trouble at the event and that the protest must not cause any obstruction. They said that he should be aware that if Cameron attended he would have armed guards with him. The young man was apparently (and not surprisingly) very shaken by this experience. (Steph, comment on blog post at IDYW, 2010)

Like the North Devon Journal article quoted earlier, which documents young people being prevented from speaking at a council meeting, this is an example of 'governance by exclusion' (Lipman, 2013). It is not only that 'some communities will be better placed than others to make the Big Society vision a reality' (Commission on Big Society, 2011, p.6); it is also that some people including young people and youth workers in certain areas are *prevented* from taking action. Workers fear they will lose current or future work if they do not toe the line, and those who do decide to protest often feel quite isolated. This could go some way to explaining why protest against youth service cuts has been limited in many areas of the country, as one of the research participants comments here:

> I don't think youth work's been unified for ages, I really don't think, like in [city] the youth service just got absolutely disestablished, just ripped apart, you wouldn't even have known it really. I was going to marches in London, and saying 'How many people are coming?' 'Oh, I can't be arsed with that'. No one done it, no one comes together. We say it, but no one actually does it. (Mark)

Meanwhile, competition for diminishing pots of money undermines unity and solidarity between organisations; in this way, market processes act to diminish the effectiveness of strikes, protests and the refusal of dubious funding sources:

> I think we've got to be more hopeful [...] make a stand, and make other people make a stand […] I just think [...] someone's gonna break it. They're doing the

> whole divide and rule thing […] We're voluntary, we're a charity, we're small and we're doing this. And then Catch 22[11] are there and they've got a million young people and they've got centres everywhere and they're always gonna be the ones that break it. But you've got to find enough people that will stand with you. (Nicola, voluntary sector volunteer)

Both Mark and Nicola are politically aware and motivated, but fear that any action they take might be undermined by other youth workers and larger organisations. My own experience of protesting locally against youth service cuts seemed to bear out these concerns:

> Today we demonstrated against the 'reorganisation' of our local youth services which will see youth clubs shut, half of all posts deleted, and remaining employees moved to generic caseworker posts. My colleague and I had feared the demonstration would be small but the turn-out is still disappointing – around 25 of us. We stood with our banners outside the town hall, feeling somewhat downhearted. No other youth workers turned up – not even the ones who had helped plan this demonstration! - and nobody who works for the youth service is here. Perhaps they have been warned not to come. We see the principal youth officer walking past, looking at us – perhaps a coincidence or perhaps she is checking whether any of her employees are here.
>
> (Research diary, 2011)

Even in such circumstances, resistance is not impossible. Louise's story provides a good example of a strong campaign that was widely supported by youth workers and young people, despite attempts by the local authority to dissuade people from taking part. While only a minority of the youth workers I interviewed were substantially involved in sustained protest, nearly all were critical of the direction that youth work is going in. By making attempts to reclaim control over their own work they are countering the discourse of 'there is no alternative' (Woolford & Curran, 2013). However, the lack of protest in some areas, while understandable, has enabled youth services to disappear or disintegrate with barely a whimper.

(2) Enterprising

While protesting against cuts is clearly a form of resistance to neoliberal policy shifts in youth work, it is paradoxical, perhaps, that social enterprise is also used at times as a political alternative to overly bureaucratic and targeted forms of youth work. Social enterprises are generally understood as 'organisations that use business methods to

[11] One of the largest national youth charities.

achieve social goals' (Meadows and Pike, 2010, p.129), or more specifically as 'a business that trades to tackle social problems, improve communities, people's life chances or the environment' (Social Enterprise UK, 2011, p.4). They have been part of government policy since New Labour times (Cabinet Office, 2006), and play an expanded role in the Coalition's Big Society rhetoric as an alternative to an expensive and interfering state. However idealistic the founders of social enterprises might be, these organisations pragmatically 'need to find backers who believe that their ideas will "work", have an "impact" and generate "returns" as social outcomes or as profit' (Ball, 2012, p.77).

Sarah's story illustrates some of the dilemmas of juggling business and youth work. She began her working life in administration and became a youth worker through a university access course, but she struggled to find a job where she could develop work that was based on young people's needs rather than on funding priorities. Her first significant youth work role was with a social housing provider where she said she found the work, '… too structured. Too curriculum based and everything's got to fit into a box'. She then moved on to a charity that ran youth clubs on behalf of the local authority, but the charity seemed to be moving in a similar direction:

> They started going for all the government contracts [...] It was basically accredited training, bums on seats, let's get paid for numbers. And I just couldn't do it. I really, I just felt really bad for the young people. I felt I wasn't doing what I was trained to do, what I wanted to do, what I felt passionate about. So that's why I left and started the business.

Sarah and her colleague went independent, setting up a youth work business in the borough where Sarah had grown up. This was far from being a move in favour of market values; in Sarah's case it was a form of resistance, a way of gaining autonomy and moving away from structured approaches that have come to dominate youth work (Davies, 2005; 2013; IDYW, 2011). The paradox of using a business model to challenge the status quo was clearly apparent to Sarah from the beginning.

> I started it with a business partner. I hate the word business partner because like I said before, there's no room for business in youth work, but yeah, we kind of had this idea, 'Let's go back to basics, have a community group, meet the needs of the young people we work with, great ideas, let's do this!' [...] We moved into a centre for start-up organisations, and the local small business centre jumped on

> board and went 'Yep, we'll help you with business plan, market strategy and financial strategies,' and we was like [uncertainly] 'Okaaay, great,' [laughs]. So we kind of fell into it. And then we got the local recognition, we got the business awards. But at the back of my mind it was niggling me that we're going down a business route, we're going down a business route, we're losing our grassroots. And like, if I wore a suit the young people would say to me, 'Who's in court today, who are you going to court with?' And I'd be like, 'Well no, I'm going to a networking meeting.' [Laughs.] And they were kind of like, 'Huh? Why haven't you got your tracksuit on? You look different.'

Contrasting the ideas of community and grassroots with those of business and market, Sarah is clearly ambivalent about her new entrepreneurial identity. This ambivalence is embodied in how she presents herself, even in the clothes she wears. To build credibility as the representative of a new organisation she bases herself in an enterprise centre, wins business awards and wears a business suit to meetings; however, this role sits uncomfortably with her tracksuit-wearing youth worker identity. At different times in our conversation Sarah spoke about the visceral, material and linguistic juggling that was required and how she drew on her past experience as a business administrator:

> I'm glad I did have that working business sense because it's helped me to do what I do, and it's helped me with the admin side of doing what I do. It's helped me to be able to throw on a suit, go to a meeting, and articulate what I want to do in the way that they need to hear it and in the way that I'll get the funding. So even though [with] young people I'll talk slang [laughs] but when it comes to being able to achieve my goals I can kind of switch heads and step into different shoes to meet what I need to do, basically. But it is hard to juggle the two.

Sarah's reference to ‘working business sense’ is interesting, drawing on a conception of business that is about hard work rather than profit. She says that she would probably be seen as working-class and dual heritage, and told me that her background helps her to 'empathise with young people'; perhaps it also contributes to her ability to juggle the ethics and identities of business and youth work.

> I didn't have the best of the best, I didn't have a silver spoon, it was kind of, come from a single parent family, make ends meet, was working from age 13, besides having my children I have worked *all* my life, from 13, *all* my life.

In one sense, Sarah is an accomplished entrepreneur. She left a paid full-time job to start an exciting and risky new venture, successfully links the worlds of youth work and business, and has achieved recognition in this world through winning awards and taking part in networks for women in business. And yet, she also challenges the ideal of the

Big Society entrepreneur. Her approach is based on open democratic youth work rather than on targeted work with monetised outcomes, and she constantly questions business values and language. She has created a board made up entirely of young people and a youth forum that is currently campaigning against local and national housing policy. Some of this more controversial work is enabled by the business structure of her organisation, although funding is inevitably hard to find:

> I think the pros are that we're not governed by red tape. If we want to do something, we'll do it [laughs]. Obviously we have to make sure it's safe and [pause] we have to kind of have some kind of structure to be known, 'Right, this is a formal group, we're not just messing around, we are actually, we're in it for the long haul'. So the pros are kind of that we can do what we want to do. The cons are funding. You *need* money to be able to do a lot of the things that you want to do. And especially if you're gonna go into kind of political challenges, nobody wants to fund political stuff, nobody wants to get involved with that. If you're challenging a lot of the local authority services, they're not gonna fund you to do that.

While there is a valid argument against any incursion of private companies into public services, Sarah's story demonstrates that those who choose to follow a business route are not necessarily willing neoliberal entrepreneurs; this reinforces the point made earlier, that the boundaries between state, voluntary and private organisations are eroding (McGimpsey, 2013). It is important to differentiate between grassroots enterprises like Sarah's and multi-million pound companies like Serco. Grassroots social enterprises are no panacea - Sarah's business pays her only for seventeen hours a week on minimum wage, and she does a huge amount more than that on a voluntary basis. However, the problems Sarah has encountered – organisational insecurity, precarious and low paid employment, dilemmas around funding and contracts, worries about role and identity – are common to many small organisations.

Forming a social enterprise with a critical agenda can be seen as an act of resistance, but enterprise can also be understood in Foucault's terms as a neoliberal technology of the self (Kelly et al, 2013). It is questionable whether social enterprises are intrinsically less ethical than charities or local government, which are now encouraged to behave as enterprises themselves. And yet, the normalisation of business in the wider youth work field is partly brought about through this 'acceptable' face of social enterprise, which perhaps pushes youth work further and faster in the direction of commodification and

normalises privatisation. Work with young people is evaluated according to a logic of profit and surplus; distasteful compromises are made in order to buy the space to campaign and to do longer-term open access youth work; and youth workers receive ever-lower wages on insecure or non-existent contracts. I will now explore the experience of three workers who live every day the precarious employment conditions of youth work in the Big Society.

(3) Working precariously

If the protester and the social entrepreneur are two (sometimes overlapping) identities available in the Big Society, another must be the precarious worker. A large-scale survey of community and voluntary sector workers found that 5% have more than four jobs at a time, 9% are on zero hour contracts and 24% do not receive the living wage (Unison, 2014a). These trends were reflected amongst the part-time youth workers I spoke to. Officially negotiated JNC pay scales for youth workers have been falling in real terms for many years (CYWU, 2013, p.6); unfortunately, this was barely even relevant to most of the part-time workers I interviewed, few of whom were employed on JNC terms and conditions. Organisations are relying increasingly on volunteers and unpaid interns, filling the gaps with self-employed workers from employment agencies. This is part of a global trend towards precarity, a term that refers to 'all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons' (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005; see also Foti, 2004). In an era where high-level business and administration skills are seen as necessary to survive in a competitive marketplace, 'efficiency savings' are often made in the area of frontline staffing:

> Profits are much more important than the lives, hopes and well-being of employees who have given their working lives to these organisations. In general, no level of profit ever makes these jobs secure. (Apple, 2006, pp.15-16)

Part-time youth workers have always patched together several different jobs to make ends meet (Bolger & Scott, 1984), and yet today's conditions are ever more challenging and exploitative; particularly for the mostly working-class, female and black insecurely employed part-time youth workforce. Research participants Zandra (black working-class), Keiron (black working-class) and Diana (white working-class) all came across as

particularly enthusiastic, caring and thoughtful youth workers, each with several years of youth work experience. Their only income is from youth work and they are all committed to this work as a longer term career. This section focuses on them as precarious youth workers because their poor pay and lack of job security are not only problematic for them as individuals; they are also symptomatic of the lack of value placed in long-term trusting relationships between youth workers and young people, and undermine notions of frontline youth work as a career in its own right.

Zandra is a self-employed youth worker – not through choice, but because neither of the two organisations she works for formally employs her. As Ross (2009, p.6) argues, self-employment 'should not be associated or identified exclusively with the neoliberal ethos of the self-directed entrepreneur'. Zandra has little of the flexibility usually associated with self-employment, and because she has no contract she also has few rights, no holiday or sick pay, and is responsible for her own expenses, tax and national insurance. One of her jobs involves working five hours per week running a youth club for a local charity. Despite working there regularly for two years and achieving some of the highest attendance figures in the organisation, she feels she is shown little goodwill:

> I was meant to attend a first aid workshop on Monday, but then [manager] emailed me to say, 'Sorry we don't pay sessional workers for training,' even though it's mandatory training. [...] I said to [manager], 'You can't expect me to attend training and not get paid. You don't pay my sick leave, you don't pay my holiday. But training, mandatory training, you should pay me to do.'

Zandra also works twenty hours a week for a friend whose small business supports young people not in training, education or employment. The income of this business comes from a single source, a charity that wins contracts from colleges, national government and European schemes and then subcontracts to smaller providers. The smaller providers (such as Zandra's employer) are paid in arrears and only if they have met demanding performance targets. Such 'payment by results' arrangements have become common in public service provision over the last two years under the Coalition Government; instead of providers being funded for the work they do, they are only paid for the outcomes they achieve (Shiel & Breidenbach-Roe, 2014). Research has shown that these contracts are particularly disadvantageous to smaller organisations (Crowe, Gash & Kippin, 2014; Rochester, 2013); they are also particularly unfair for self-employed youth workers. When contracts change or targets are not met, the business

has no reserves to cover wages so neither Zandra nor her friend get paid, even though they have done the work. This leaves Zandra as a single parent hard-pressed to pay her bills:

> We've been cutting our hours down [...] We managed to pay ourselves last week for May [...] We're getting paid shit (laughs). Rubbish. [...] I probably get paid about 800 a month. […] I've gone back to basics, that's what I've done. […] My children are going through that stage though […] They want the things, I suppose.

In a different city, I interviewed Keiron and Diana who are studying together for a part-time youth work qualification. They, too, are precarious youth workers, although their circumstances are different to Zandra's. Diana is employed as a youth worker by a charity on behalf of the local authority whose office she is based in. She has a six-month contract for ten hours per week which is inconveniently arranged as four short evening sessions. A single parent, Diana somehow survives on the £125 per week she is paid for this job, minus the £25 it costs her to get there. Her friend Keiron works four evenings each week, one in his local youth club and three at a very large youth centre which is part of a chain of modern facilities set up and sponsored by a large regional company. He is relatively happy with his role there, but has noticed a significant drop in staffing that makes his post feel insecure: more youth workers are desperately needed to work with the large numbers of young people attending, but the centre is now advertising for play workers rather than youth workers on a lower pay grade of £7.50 per hour.

Keiron:	A lot of people are disheartened about the playworker advertising because it's saying basically that we don't need youth workers.
Diana:	Yeah. And I've applied like an idiot.
Tania:	Why've you applied?
Diana:	Only because of my hours and money and my social situation, you know, I have two children and I have ten hours work, so, I can't claim any kind of benefit on ten hours [...] And it's just a necessity […] it went against everything I believe in.

Like many other larger youth organisations, the charity seemed to be cutting corners with face-to-face staff. Keiron used to be paid extra for planning and preparation but overtime is no longer available and he is required to do preparatory work during youth work session times. Diana and Keiron felt that the management does not understand the effects this can have; their managers are 'more middle-class' and often have little (if

any) youth work experience.

Diana:	Well to me the managers get paid far too much [...]
Keiron:	It's never fair, is it? We do a lot more.
Diana:	More. And we're empathetic in what we do and we're passionate about it and enthusiastic. And not too bothered about money. But then it makes you frustrated because you need money to live [...] People with salaries, with massive salaries and you see it's a job role and it's like the higher up you get, the less your role is but the more money you get. It doesn't make any sense. None whatsoever.
Keiron:	Yeah that's true. [...] They work hard to work their way up and when they do they relax. They have a nice salary now.
Diana:	But *have* they worked hard to work their way up? […] I can't think of one that's been doing youth work for many, many years.

As if their working lives were not already precarious enough, Diana and Keiron had also worked recently for a small private company where they were promised wages that never materialised. The organisation failed to reimburse their travel expenses and did not provide adequate money for food for young people during projects and trips. The business they had worked for claimed to be non-profit, but as Diana said, 'It's definitely for profit for someone!'

> The professionals think [...] that this is an amazing organisation, cos it's branded that way. But I don't. For me myself it's gone from being like a bad organisation to maybe being a little bit dodgy because it's like the funding that's been applied for, [projects] which we've not done […] and there's not been one pound spent on the organisation […] No drinks, no food, no nothing, no petrol money, no parking ticket money, anything. (Diana)

Despite their negative experiences, Keiron and Diana remained idealistic and passionate about youth work and had been meeting with an ‘innovations advisor’ at a local business school, planning to start up their own company. This was motivated by their love of working with young people and their frustration with the existing youth work organisations in their area:

> Because we see these things all the time and we see so much bad practice […] we want to show that there can be a good organisation there that really cares about young people. We're not all about, you know, money and targets, like other organisations are. (Keiron)

Diana, Keiron and Zandra were articulate communicators full of enthusiasm and ideas.

All had several years of experience and seemed to be particularly committed and skilled youth workers. It does a great disservice to young people that so many excellent part-time youth workers exist for long periods on a hodgepodge of insecure part-time, sessional, self-employed, temporary, irregularly paid, and out-of-pocket unpaid work.

(4) Volunteering

Volunteers have always made up the majority of the youth workforce and continue to do so (Davies, 1999a; Mellor & McDonnell, 2010). However, the Big Society agenda is based on the more ambitious idea that volunteers will take over and manage complex services formerly run by the state (for example, parents running free schools, and local residents managing libraries). In youth work this means that volunteers are increasingly expected to take the place of professionally trained workers in managerial as well as face-to-face roles, often without the support of professionally trained colleagues (Davies, 2013). To explore this further, I consider the story of Billie, who is volunteering as an organiser and youth worker in a new youth partnership in her local neighbourhood in a northern city. Here she outlines her voluntary role:

> I'm project managing the partnership. So Sheila, who's the head of the community association, she's the partnership manager, so she's the schmoozer, she's the one that's sort of keeping all the contacts, trying to find us a more permanent base. And I'm sort of looking out for more funding opportunities and ensuring that [the local authority monitoring database] is updated, all the monitoring's being done, paying the bills [laughs], checking CRBs, checking all our volunteers are all registered. (Billie)

From the way Billie describes her own and her colleague Sheila's roles here, they might easily be taken as professional managers in the voluntary or social enterprise sectors. They have important-sounding job titles within a stratified hierarchy, and are involved in the full range of tasks that are expected of youth work managers today – the only difference is that they are unpaid. Billie works full-time for a social housing group and is understandably tired from her dual roles, saying cheerfully, 'I'm probably going to fall asleep at my desk if I don't step back a bit.' Although Billie seemed to be enjoying the voluntary work, the pressure was exacerbated by the constant round of administrative activity required in relation to the local council's annual commissioning processes:

> I'm going to a consultation this afternoon [...] where we're gonna discuss the upcoming commissioning funding, which is crazy because we've only just really got off the ground, and I'm already looking at next year's funding.

Like many youth work volunteers, Billie got involved because she wanted to do something for the young people in her local area, particularly after the closure of her city's youth service. Although she might be portrayed as a good citizen of the Big Society, she is clearly not a supporter of the Coalition Government.

> The last 18 months I've just seen what a difficult time young people are having, and personally I just think they're having a shitty time to be honest and they're really marginalised […], they've been really severely affected by the spending cuts. Seeing the end of the youth service was really sad.

The closure of the youth service heralded both opportunity and threat for Billie and her fellow volunteers: it provided the impetus to start a local youth club where one had not previously existed, but on the other hand it meant that they were isolated and having to learn as they went along. The support and training that had previously been available to the city's voluntary youth sector were now absent:

> The commissioning thing has been really difficult [...] Once you get the funding there's no support there, no advice. [...] It's very much just, 'Right, there's your money, off you go.'

When youth services close, the effects are felt beyond the walls of boarded up buildings. It is not only that established youth clubs are lost; there is also a dissipation of institutional knowledge, experience and resources built up over many decades. Provision becomes atomised and voluntary sector groups become competitors, bidding against each other for contracts. Those fulfilling their role as good entrepreneurial citizens in the Big Society are unlikely to receive the support they need. This means that new opportunities are only available to those with existing skills and wide social networks:

> While government discourse on openness implies a level playing field, responsibilisation brings into the process of access people's differential capacity to mobilise expertise, resources and entrepreneurialism. (Higham, 2014, p.125)

According to census data published by the council, the ward in which Billie lives and volunteers is among the least deprived in her city, seeming to confirm research showing that prosperous communities benefit most from volunteering (Civil Exchange, 2013).

However, the situation is more complicated than this might suggest: the neighbourhood would not be described as prosperous on a national scale, and the youth club members are far from being a privileged group. Most of those attending are Eastern European Roma, a group that is particularly stigmatised and often excluded from services. Neither is Billie's volunteering a form of outsider do-gooding; while she has been able to draw on relatively high levels of social and cultural capital from her professional employment and university education, she is far from being a 'lady bountiful' figure. She comes from a white working-class background, has a local accent, and comes across as humble and down-to-earth. Her primary motivations are altruistic although Billie acknowledges honestly that she also benefits from her voluntary work in terms of personal and professional development:

> It's a labour of love [...] I think with the partnership we saw such a great opportunity to do something incredible. And from a personal, a worker sort of experience, I've learned so much, you know. Just things like the recruitment process and short-listing and project planning and evaluation and stuff. It's been great. And [the other volunteers], I've learned so much from them. I take my hat off to them, you know, because there is an overlap with my job but they're just doing this for the young people. And that's why volunteers are inspiring, aren't they, really. […] I'm getting a lot of plaudits at work, so it's not just, I'm getting a lot of personal satisfaction and a lot of professional satisfaction as well.

As commissioning rounds and funding mechanisms become more complex, volunteers need to develop managerial skills and professional networks if they are to 'succeed' even in sustaining small neighbourhood clubs. My own involvement in setting up a local youth workers' co-operative seems to confirm this: even as a tiny and mainly volunteer-run organisation we juggle several new funding applications at any time while also providing different monitoring information at different times for existing funders. All of this unpaid entrepreneurial activity has clear implications for equality. For all their faults, local authority youth services once had the infrastructure and experience to support and train local people, of whom many were working-class, black and disabled, to run youth clubs and projects (both in-house and in local voluntary organisations), to employ them on appropriate professional salaries, and often to support them through local qualifications and university. Now we have only the promise of social enterprise, in which 'success' might mean being able to employ a couple of part-time youth workers on minimum wage, or sustaining an organisation on entirely voluntary (and mainly female) labour:

> Public responsibilities have been shifted onto the informal sector, under the argument that the government can no longer afford the expense of such a service... it is largely the unpaid labor of women in the family and in the local communities that will be exploited to deal with the state's shedding of its previous responsibilities. (Apple, 2006, pp.24-25)

Billie's story is inspiring; along with her neighbours she has set up a vibrant and exciting new youth club that is working with an excluded and marginalised group of young people in an area the local authority had neglected. However, her organisation's success does not lend credence to the Big Society agenda, because government cuts mean that there is a serious lack of support for volunteers like Billie. Current policy works to entrench inequalities by limiting *who* has the resources to set up a youth club and *where*, and also by creating conditions where it will be difficult to survive: 'How poorly social entrepreneurs or community representatives will fare in a social market when pitted against hedge fund backed for-profit providers is predictable' (Corbett & Walker, 2013, p.461).

Conclusion: In and against the youth work market?[12]

A few weeks later...

The youth workers are chatting with a couple of young women by the swings when Danny comes by and says bluntly to Ricky, 'I've been looking for you'. Jo nods and says hi but stays with the girls while Ricky walks with Danny towards the pond. Danny seems angry. 'Where've you been? You're never around any more. We've been there for you all this time and now you're working with random girls instead!' Slightly surprised Ricky says, 'you know we can't only work with you guys, we're here for all the young people in the area.' Danny looks away, scuffing his shoes on the ground. Ricky thinks for a while and adds, 'You're right though, we've not been around so much, I'm sorry. We've had cuts, we're not out every evening any more. What's up anyway?' Danny explains he's left college. He never really wanted to go and he didn't get on with his tutors. 'It's not fair,' he says, 'I've

[12] I have borrowed the term 'in and against' from the London to Edinburgh Weekend Return Group's 1979 book, *In and Against the State*.

gone for about a hundred jobs and they don't even write back. Even if I got an interview I haven't got the right clothes and I've got no money. Anyway my face won't fit. I went to Connexions and it's shut down. They won't take me back at college. I don't know what to do'.

Ricky sympathises; he's been looking for work too since losing most of his part-time youth work hours, but he doesn't say anything about that now. Instead they talk through some of Danny's options and arrange to visit a youth employment project together the next day. They chat about Danny's girlfriend and his football team. He seems more cheerful or at least less angry. As they say 'later, see ya', Ricky thinks back to what Danny said last time they met: 'If someone's not a success in life it's their own fault'. That's what the government wants us to believe, he thinks. As if there's no unemployment, no cuts, no inequalities, no poverty, no racism. Those old ideas of the deserving and undeserving poor haven't gone anywhere. He decides to talk to Jo later about whether there's something they can do other than just picking up the pieces. The trouble is they're busy, stressed and demoralised and it's hard just to keep going at the moment. He sighs, watching the ducks for a while before turning back towards the swings.

Big Society rhetoric tells us that we can each become an 'entrepreneurial, passionate self' (Kelly et al, 2013, p.11). If we fail it seems that we only have ourselves to blame. By calling unemployed people 'skivers', and telling youth workers that their services were 'crap' and should be closed, the government pushes the blame for the economic failure of neoliberalism onto working-class and black communities - particularly women, who are more or less implicitly expected to take responsibility. The Coalition Government trades on existing sexist, racist and classist suspicions in relation to the beneficiaries and workers of the welfare state, and neoliberalism is sold as a form of common sense (Hall & O'Shea, 2013). The stories of the youth workers in this chapter suggest that neoliberal policy implementation cannot be understood only as a process of consent and 'freedom'; it is also important also to recognise the elements of coercion. The majority of cuts and closures are imposed on the poorest communities, and 'it is not necessary to obtain their consent except to the extent that their resistance necessitates concessions' (Lipman, 2013, p.12).

And yet, freedoms and consent are part of the picture too. Neoliberal governmentality can be seen as 'the governing of populations through the production of "willing", "self-governing", entrepreneurial selves' (Ball, 2012, p.3). If the 'skiver' is the villain in the austerity tale, the social entrepreneur is the hero, whose seductive narrative tells us that we can all be creative, take risks, help our communities and still pay our bills. Those of us who want to change things, who want to make things better in our communities, are sold the dream that we can all 'do something incredible', in Billie's words. And perhaps we can! Some of the workers and volunteers in this chapter seem somehow to be using neoliberal freedoms while also critiquing them; a longer-term study would be needed to see how effective or possible this will continue to be.

Perhaps there is a part of many of us that wants to believe that social entrepreneurship is possible and that we can do it too; that (like Sarah) we can juggle the business suit and the tracksuit, or (like Diana and Keiron) that we can 'show that there can be a good organisation there that really cares about young people'. I use the word 'we' deliberately; my colleagues and I also had this dream, and although we avoid words like 'social enterprise' and 'business' we have set up our own small organisation in the face of cuts and in opposition to the outcomes agenda (see Chapter 7). Little wonder that youth workers' response to neoliberal policy is contradictory: even as we challenge the commodification of our relationships with young people, we are almost wholly entangled in these processes when we set up our social enterprises, engage in commissioning, bid for outsourced public services, and encourage young people to become the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Alternative definitions of social entrepreneurship depart from the idea of imitating business methods and principles, and almost sound politically radical: 'Entrepreneurial processes are about identifying, challenging and breaking institutional patterns, to temporarily depart from norms and values in society' (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2007, p.29, translated in Bjerke & Ramo, 2011, p.23). Like corporate social responsibility, new philanthropy and compassionate capitalism, such definitions of social enterprise can be particularly problematic because they soften the harder edges of the market: 'commerce is described as art and as revolution and huge corporations are portrayed as agents of the counterculture' (Solnit, 2014, p.34). Using the tools of neoliberalism to

challenge its power will inevitably be a compromised form of resistance, and it will be interesting to see how today's new and idealistic youth work organisations will fare over the longer term.

It seems likely that youth organisations (whether charities, businesses or the few remaining local authority youth services) will increasingly be divided into two types: small, grassroots and mostly unpaid; or larger, more business-like, and run by well-paid chief executives and managers, supported by a cast of volunteers and sessional workers on temporary contracts. What options will thoughtful and critical youth workers have in these contexts? Some of the youth workers I spoke to had discussed these issues with the young people they work with, involving them in critical reflection on the dilemmas of living politically and ethically:

> I think because they're on the receiving end of services they understand that these services are there to make money, and these [other] services are there to help me. And it's nice that should they start their own stuff in the future, they will have that understanding of, 'Am I business orientated, or am I kind of sticking to my grassroots true values and principles?' […] Although they all want money, they all want the latest trainers and the ipads and the ipods and whatever, but at the same time they understand that it's good to help each other, and you don't necessarily get paid for helping each other. (Sarah)

We cannot escape the dilemmas and contradictions of the entrepreneurial society, but critical conversation can keep the idea alive that there is an alternative to the commodification of everything. There is an important role for thoughtful political discussion with young people and with each other: 'It is nigh impossible to exaggerate the need to be collective in the face of a neo-liberal ideology that seeks to undermine the slightest hint of oppositional solidarity' (IDYW, 2014). Collective discussion is necessary if we are to think about and act on some vital practical questions. If we are both 'in and against' the market, what does this mean on an everyday basis? How can we know which compromise is a step too far? How might we resist? As Ricky wondered in the fictional passage above, can we go beyond picking up the pieces?

Such questions will be raised throughout this thesis - not to propose prescriptive answers, but to provide space to reflect on the thoughtful ideas and actions of part-time and volunteer youth workers who are particularly affected by worsening pay and

employment conditions and whose voices are rarely heard. Like the adult educators in Sanguinetti's (1999, p.157-8) study, grassroots youth workers often appear:

> as ethical, professional subjects who are exercising their agency in ways which at once resist, engage with and produce anew the discourse, reconstituting it in order to find new spaces to develop their own 'good practice', within and against it.

Over the following chapters I will further explore how neoliberal approaches to youth work reinforce inequalities and domination, while also considering some of the ways that youth workers resist and subvert the dominant policy environment: by prioritising love and care over financial and bureaucratic rationalities; by avoiding and challenging performative targets and outcomes; by refusing to collude in surveillance and social control; and by setting up idealistic and utopian youth organisations.

Chapter 4
'I just love youth work!'
Passion, resistance and emotional labour

Not just a job (1)

The sudden burst of music wakes him. Danny disentangles himself from the duvet and reaches for his phone. The voice on the other end is familiar and cheerful. 'Alright Danny, where are you? Did I wake you up?' Danny yawns and smiles, mumbling to his youth worker Ricky that he's just coming. He stretches and thinks about getting out of bed. Going to the job centre is never fun but it'll be much better to have Ricky there. Ricky's different. You can tell that being a youth worker's not just a job for him – he said it's his day off today but he still wanted to meet up with Danny. Ricky actually cares. It might be a good day, for once.

A couple of miles away, Ricky puts his phone in his pocket and sighs, eyeing up the café opposite the job centre. Danny sounded half asleep and his 'just coming' sounded overly optimistic. But never mind, he could do with a coffee anyway. Really he should be doing his own job search now they've cut his overtime, but Jo's right – he finds it easier to help young people than to help himself. The youth service won't pay him for today, he thinks to himself, even though they'll be happy to take the credit for their stats if he helps Danny get a job. Probably he shouldn't have arranged to meet Danny, but this is the kind of thing that makes the job feel worthwhile, and it was a big thing when Danny accepted his offer of help. Anyway, he likes him; he's a great lad. Ricky orders a coffee. His phone buzzes, a text saying 'b there 10mins'. He smiles and takes a seat, looking forward to the rest of the morning.

In a context where youth work is under threat from spending cuts and marketisation, it is perhaps striking that the part-timers and volunteers in this study all expressed love, passion and enjoyment for their work, and a genuine care for young people that went beyond 'just doing their job'. Rather than taking these feelings as self-evident or mentioning them only in passing, this chapter explores positive workplace emotions in

more depth. Passionate grassroots youth work can be seen as a desirable expression of care, vocation or calling (Jeffs, 2006); and yet it also needs to be explored in the context of the increasing marketisation and commodification of the youth sector.

Passion can be seen as something of a commodified concept itself, and has become almost ubiquitous in the modern workplace. Job adverts in shop windows require applicants to demonstrate their 'passion for coffee', 'love of fashion' or 'obsession with sandwiches', and the internet is full of blogs with titles such as 'Ten ways to inspire passion in the workplace' or 'You too can turn regular employees into passionate workers'. As education and welfare work is increasingly organised on market principles, managers in reconfigured services might find inspiration in 'management guru' literature that emphasises passion as a form of individual expression and profitable creativity. Whether they are in the public, private or voluntary sector, 'organisations now call for employees to love the company, to love the product and to feel motivated through their empowerment in the workplace' (Bolton, 2005, p.111). Passion is a valued commodity, claimed to bolster company profits and boost individuals' career prospects.

This chapter will explore passionate practice as an intrinsic good for young people and for workers themselves, while also thinking about the potential for emotional commitment to be commodified and exploited. In the first section I will draw on interview quotations to explore grassroots youth workers' feelings of love, passion, enjoyment and care. I will go on to introduce theories of emotional labour and emotion management in the second section and think about the exploitation and marginalisation of committed part-timers and volunteers. In the third section I will discuss whether and how passionate commitment might be a foundation for resistance against the commodified and marketised aspects of youth work.

Love and passion in youth work

> Tania: What do you like about it [youth work]?
> Alan: [Pause]. I just, I dunno, I feel comfortable with, I just really love it. I don't know. I just love it! [Laughing, shouting:] I LOVE IT!
>
> What do I like about youth work? I just love youth work! (Bridget)

When I asked part-time and volunteer youth workers what they liked about their work they often answered with the word 'love'. Although they also used the interviews and discussion groups as a chance to reflect on some of the difficulties and challenges in their work, their accounts were suffused with displays of passion for and enjoyment of youth work. These positive emotions seemed strong and genuinely held, expressed not only through their words but also through the excitement in their voices and eyes. While it is important to ask critical and theoretical questions about love and passion in youth work, I first want to spend some time discussing emotional commitment on its own terms.

Early experiences of youth work

For several of the part-timers and volunteers in this research, their passionate commitment to youth work is rooted in difficult emotional experiences in their past that inspired them to become youth workers. Some had been involved with youth work when they were young, while others felt they would have benefited from such support.

> I think I've always wanted to help people, and through experiences of being a young carer mainly, getting involved with young carers' support projects and a project for young people under stress [...] experiencing that and seeing the kind of progress *I* made from getting involved as a young person in youth work, it just kind of firmed up that that's what I wanted to do. (Mickie)

> I hated teenage years, and I wish I'd had someone there, or like a club that I went to, and therefore I think teenage years was a really, really hard time that I've ever experienced in my life and I'd really like to be good and support people going through that as well. (Lucy)

Workers wanted to make a genuine difference to young people's lives; in general this did not appear to come from an outsider position but was rooted in personal experience or in a political or ethical desire to be part of something positive. Some were motivated by particularly difficult experiences in their own lives:

> I started doing voluntary work round my local area. What really got me into it was one of my best friends, they got killed. […] And then it just kind of hit me, you know what? There's too many young people out here that this is happening to. […] I wanted young people to have the same choices that I had – and more. (Forde)

> I went to prison for a spate of time and whilst in prison took a good long look at

> myself and at my inner self and thought that this is just not for me and I'd like to give something back to the community. On coming out of prison I had a really, really good probation officer. And she noticed the rapport that I had with young people [...] She really encouraged me and pushed me forward, going into mentoring, and done a rites of passage course. Which then spurred me into thinking, wow, maybe I can be a youth worker and a good role model for the community. (Bridget)

Bridget's 'wow' moment is echoed by Mahad, who met his local detached (street-based) youth workers at a community event that his brother and nephew were involved in. Initially he had been reluctant to go along, but he was impressed by these workers who he saw as 'different':

> I just thought, 'Let me just get this done and over with, I know they're gonna be blah, blah, blah, and I'll just leave afterwards'. I went there really with that mentality and I just came back with a wow factor because they had the ideas, and the detached youth workers were really supportive, encouraging, they were giving them information on what to do, what not to do, that sort of thing, and they were just listening to them and they were taking their ideas on board. And I thought, wow, that was quite different compared to other services. […] I gained a lot of motivation, a lot of passion for youth work. […] I particularly liked the detached youth work, and having that different environment and different agendas every day, it just really made me passionate to take part and maybe become a detached youth worker one day. (Mahad)

Nearly all of the workers in this study had become youth workers as a result of accidental encounters, or through continued engagement with youth projects they had attended as young people. Youth work rarely emerged as a deliberate career choice, which perhaps makes it even more remarkable that the workers were all so enthusiastic about it. Laura came across youth work through a detached youth worker she got chatting to while she was working in a pub; again the 'wow' factor seemed to be there for her from the beginning.

> I thought it sounded fantastic. It was amazing that you actually have a profession, you actually get paid for walking around on the street, talking to the young people on their terms, on their territory, I just loved the idea of it. And I was like, 'how is it possible that in this society that exists?' It went counter to what I think of this society or this world. And I was, 'Wow!' (Laura)

Most of the participants in this study had been youth workers for several years by the time they were interviewed, and yet remember their early motivations with vivid enthusiasm. However, this should not suggest that they all enjoyed youth work

immediately or felt a natural affinity with teenagers. Louise's and Lucy's first volunteering experiences were in youth clubs:

> I was sworn at *a lot*. And I cried *a lot*. My mum would always say, 'Why do you keep going back there?', and I was like, 'The positive weighs out the negative', and I just loved it. And in the end they go from swearing to actually being really nice to you and it was just the thing that I had to go through. So it *was* hard but I did love it. (Louise)

> I was petrified the first time I walked through the door. Mine was at [my local youth club] and it's a bit of a rough area and I thought, 'Oh my god, I don't know what I'm doing here'. After the first day I thought, 'I'm not coming back, it's awful, young people are horrible'. Then afterwards I was like, 'No, it's fun'. (Lucy)

These quotations are a reminder that youth work is not easy, and that a love for youth work is not automatic. It could be that the transformation and challenge involved in building positive relationships from unpromising beginnings can bring particular satisfaction and enjoyment.

Building relationships with young people

While the workers talked about loving youth work, they also spoke with infectious emotional attachment in relation to young people. While showing awareness of the need for professional boundaries, many expressed liking and love for the young people they work with and for young people in general:

> I've known some of them for three years now and the way you see them grow and the way the relationship is, and I can be myself and they can be their self. I just think young people are fantastic, they're clever and they're switched on and they're fun. (Lucy)

> I *love* working with teenagers! Love it. That's the age group that I'm most comfortable with. (Rachel)

Several workers in this study seemed particularly to enjoy working with young people who others might see as problematic.

> I like working with the challenging ones. […] You get more out of it, don't you? (Lorenzo)

> I love all my young people, even when they're all complete and utter little swear words! They're all still lovely. (Callie)

The volunteers and part-timers in this study often emphasised what they experienced as the genuine and authentic nature of working with young people. As Navaeh put it, 'I think the face to face time is what keeps you real, it's what keeps you wanting to do it'. Workers often spoke of their relationships with young people as *real*; they were not the same as friendships, but neither could they be reduced to client-professional relationships. The youth workers in this study never spoke of young people as clients, instead referring to them simply as 'young people', 'teenagers' or 'kids'. By making this linguistic choice they seem to emphasise a relationship that is fundamentally human and perhaps less formal than the relationships between young people and other professionals.

> There's a lot of the genuineness of the relationships. I find sometimes that they're more genuine than the relationships I have with adults, or with my friends. You know, like, although that doesn't mean that I'd then be mates with the young people [...] After my dad died […] I found it really difficult being around adults, but I loved being around the kids, because I knew exactly where I stood, and they knew where they stood […] there wasn't all of this constant thinking about things too much, or judging people, or analysing, it was just like, you just get on with it, you know, and I just love that. (Alan)

Beyond monetary rewards

One of the ways that volunteers and workers explained their commitment to youth work was by contrasting it with jobs that are done solely for financial reward. Some had even given up better paid jobs to commit to youth work on a voluntary or low-paid basis:

> Outsiders think I'm mad. And part of it is because they don't understand why you'd go from earning money to not earning money and money isn't important to me but it is to a lot of my friends, so they don't understand that bit. (Louise)

Several of the paid part-timers discussed their willingness to be flexible with their time and to work extra hours without pay:

> If something's fun I find it quite hard to count it in my hours, so like we did the community day on Saturday, and that's supposed to be in my hours [...] I probably should be claiming it back in TOIL[13] or putting in for overtime for it and I just, I, realistically I won't. […] It's like, I've taken it on, I'm doing it out of choice almost. (Alan)

[13] Time Off In Lieu

> I come in on my days off. Because that's the only time that that meeting, or meeting that young person, could be done. […] I can't on any conceivable concept say 'I need money for coming in on my day off'. (Quincie)

> When you've got passion for something you don't continuously look at the time or how much you're getting paid, you just get into it. (Mahad)

These workers did not see themselves as exploited; they 'gave extra' through choice and as a result of their commitment to the work, the young people and their colleagues:

> I get paid for seventeen hours. […] And I probably put in about a fifty hour week. So it is, it is hard. Exhausting. But I wouldn't change it. (Sarah)

The workers' flexibility around their use of time and their expected rewards contributed to a sense of commitment, passion and enjoyment that seemed to form part of their youth work identities. At times these identities were formed in direct contrast to people in less satisfying jobs:

> I was seeing people that I didn't want to end up like [...] just miserable old men doing the same job, day in, day out, not getting any job satisfaction [...] They used to say 'Nobody likes their job' [...] I thought, 'Well, somebody must do'. So I started looking back into youth work. (Lorenzo)

Passionate grassroots youth work

So far in this chapter I have included a relatively large amount of interview data to build up a picture of the passion with which grassroots youth workers discuss their work. Their positive emotions are demonstrative of a principled and value-based commitment to young people which could perhaps be seen as a 'political ethic of care' (Taggart, 2011, p.86). This is not to suggest that their emotional experiences of youth work are unstintingly positive. Emotions wavered and were often ambivalent and contradictory. The workers also talked about negative emotions, sometimes associated with challenging situations with young people or forms of youth work they do not enjoy, and more often with target cultures, spending cuts, surveillance systems and hierarchical management. Overwhelmingly, however, their face-to-face work with young people was expressed as enjoyable and satisfying, even when it was difficult.

I do not mean to suggest that all youth workers love their work. Perhaps the emphasis placed by workers in this study on enjoyment might be related to their particular position as volunteers and part-timers. Youth work is an important part of their lives but

most have other interests and commitments, so any difficulties might perhaps be more easily tolerated. They spend a greater proportion of their time directly working with young people than their managers do, and relatively less time on tedious bureaucratic tasks or stressful managerial work. Some might have been youth workers for a shorter period than senior staff and so they may be less jaded. In addition, it is likely that these interviewees had a stronger commitment than the average part-timer; after all, they volunteered to be interviewed about their work for no personal gain.

Since transcribing the interviews for this study, however, I have become more attuned to expressions of passion, love and enjoyment, and I notice that other face-to-face workers (including myself) very often refer to youth work in these terms. Before the interviews I had come to take these deep and positive feelings for granted, focusing my research on the more negative side – the things that get in the way of youth work. Youth workers are by no means the only welfare and education professionals who love their work in spite of inherent challenges and encroaching managerialism (see for example Day, 2004; Taggart, 2011) and it is important for critical researchers to acknowledge love and passion in their own right. Later in this chapter I will ask whether passionate workplace commitment might contribute to workers' ability to resist target cultures and hierarchical management practices. First I will reflect on theories of emotional labour and emotion management and their relevance for understanding the exploitative potential of passionate youth work.

Exploited emotions?

The concept of emotional labour was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild (2003) in *The Managed Heart.* Originally published in 1983, this book uses ethnographic and interview material from flight attendants (airline cabin crew) to argue that service sector workers' emotions are often tightly controlled and exploited by employers. Just as factory workers are alienated from their manual labour when it is turned into profit, Hochschild argues that service sector workers can become alienated from their emotional labour. The flight attendants in Hochschild's study were taught to boost future flight sales by smiling, being friendly and generally creating a positive emotional experience for passengers. They were trained in staying cheerful when dealing with

demanding passengers and their success was closely monitored through customer feedback. Building on Goffman's (1959) analysis of how people present themselves to maintain social norms, Hochschild contrasts the 'emotion work' undertaken in everyday personal lives with that which is required in service sector workplaces. Her contention is that emotional work becomes exploitative once it is prescribed and controlled by an employer rather than by the individual themselves:

> Emotion work is no longer a private act, but a public act, bought on the one hand and sold on the other. Those who direct emotion work are no longer the individuals themselves but are instead paid stage managers who select, train and supervise others. (Hochschild, 2003, p.118-9)

Hochschild argues that emotional work in both personal and work spheres can be seen as either surface acting or deep acting. Surface acting means feeling one emotion while displaying another. This might take the form of a false 'have a nice day!' at a supermarket checkout, or insincere friendliness at a party. Deep acting means calling up a real feeling in order to act more convincingly. To use the same examples, this would mean actually *wanting* the customer to have a nice day, or being *genuinely* friendly at the party. Wearing a 'painted on smile' at work was not seen as good enough by the airline managers in Hochschild's study. Customers and managers demanded *genuine* good humour, so that 'seeming to “love the job” becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort' (Hochschild, 2003, p.6).

Emotional labour is a gendered concept, and has been most widely developed and adapted in the study of female-dominated service work and the caring professions (Gorman, 2000; Gregor, 2010; Smith, 1992; 2012; Taggart, 2011). Whether in private or in public, women's emotional work is under-valued because it is perceived as ‘coming naturally’ (Steinberg & Figart, 1999). This can be seen in particular in Smith's (1992; 2012) studies of the emotional labour of student nurses, which found that complex caring and emotional skills are insufficiently recognised in training and pay structures. Clearly, emotional labour does not operate in the same way across different spheres: in contrast to flight attendants whose emotional work is rigidly controlled and monitored, the emotions of professionals like nurses (and youth workers) tend to be less tightly prescribed. As boundaries between public and private break down, however, the

experiences of service sector and professional workers are moving closer together. For example, nurses' care skills have been distilled into a 'compassion index' which monitors their emotional work (Smith, 2012), while airline crews negotiate an increasingly complex set of emotional demands that encompass safety responsibilities and care for ill passengers (Bolton & Boyd, 2003).

In an era where bureaucracy and target cultures seem to undermine the importance of human relationships, the concept of emotional labour has renewed relevance as well as increased complexity for caring professionals. Public and voluntary sector workplaces increasingly use business methods and are affected by the 'cult of the customer' (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992). Workers in these sectors 'find themselves having to present the calm and caring face of the public sector professional whilst also having to present a smiling face to clients who now behave as demanding customers' (Bolton, 2005, p.128). I will now discuss how this analysis is relevant to youth work.

Youth work as emotion work

Caring engagement with young people is intrinsic to the youth work role; when young people demand genuine rather than fake emotional engagement from their youth workers they are expressing a reasonable human desire rather than acting as demanding customers. Nevertheless, youth workers' emotional work can still be seen as being exploited, particularly when profit is involved. The previous chapter discussed how private companies have entered the youth work field, commodified systems such as 'payment by results' have become more common, and youth workers are increasingly employed in precarious and ill-paid conditions. In this context, the survival and success of youth work organisations are heavily reliant on the often poorly rewarded emotional labour of grassroots youth workers. Youth work organisations are benefiting from the emotional labour of workers, particularly volunteers, part-timers and sessional workers who do most of the face-to-face work and yet are least rewarded, often seen as more disposable or replaceable than senior managers and administrators.

Recognising the complexity of emotions in diverse work settings, Sharon Bolton (2005; 2009; Bolton & Boyd, 2003) builds on Hochschild's work to develop a theory of emotion management that can be usefully applied to youth work. Bolton agrees with

Hochschild that there is potential for exploitation and control of workers' emotions, and yet emphasises that workers must be understood 'as knowledgeable agents who are able to consent, comply or resist and who also have the potential to collectively alter the balance of power' (Bolton, 2005, p.87). Although this understanding could be criticised for under-estimating the top-down aspects of disciplinary power, the model is useful in emphasising how workers manage their emotions in complex ways and for different purposes. It is based on four overlapping types of emotion management:

Table 5: Bolton's emotion management model

Pecuniary	Emotional work that is harnessed for profit (similar to Hochschild's emotional labour).
Prescriptive	Emotional work that is required by organisational or professional norms.
Presentational	Everyday emotional interactions, particularly with colleagues, which tend to follow social norms (building on Goffman's understanding of social interaction).
Philanthropic	Emotional work as a 'gift' to customers, clients or colleagues.

(Summarised from Bolton, 2005; 2009; Bolton & Boyd, 2003)

Youth work examples of Hochschild's emotional labour or Bolton's 'pecuniary' emotion management can be seen in the previous chapter. Keiron and Diana worked for a small private company that promised to pay them but failed even to give them essential travel and food expenses. This employer seems to be exploiting them, profiting from their work without adequately rewarding them. Their other employers pay them more conventionally but clearly seek to keep labour costs to an absolute minimum, paying for very short sessions, not paying for preparation time, and employing playworkers on lower rates than youth workers to do a very similar job. Zandra and her colleague are exploited by their funding body which profits from their close and caring relationships with young people who might be seen as 'hard to reach'. This funder, a charity, only pays them if targets have been met, irrespective of how much time these workers have spent with the young people. These cases demonstrate how organisations benefit from

youth workers' emotional labour. Good youth workers have the ability to form relationships with young people in complex and challenging situations, partly because the young people can tell that the worker genuinely cares about them. Without these caring and genuine relationships, the organisations will not meet their targets or maintain a good reputation. In this way, they can be understood as directly profiting from youth workers' emotional labour.

Bolton's 'prescriptive' emotion management refers to emotions that are prescribed or required by professional or organisational rules or norms. This understanding emphasises the professional aspects of workplace emotions: in terms of youth work, love and passion might almost be seen as *required* - or at least expected - rather than being remarkable. Half a century ago, youth workers were said to need to possess a 'burning love of humanity' (Brew 1957, p.112; see also Orpin, 2011). Emotional commitment continues to be seen as almost mandatory; for example, one key youth work text argues that anybody who doesn't enjoy the work 'should find another job' (Robertson, 2005, p.47). It would be seen as counter-intuitive and perhaps socially unacceptable to work with challenging and often vulnerable young people and say 'it's just a job – I don't really care about the young people'. This is not to say that youth workers' passion is contrived or inauthentic, but that it could be seen as fulfilling professional expectations. Similarly, Bolton's presentational emotion management emphasises the emotional work involved in fulfilling social norms at work. 'Philanthropic' emotional work goes beyond these expectations, and is conceived of as a gift. As such, it might perhaps be thought of as an alternative or in opposition to the commodification of public and voluntary work. I will return to 'presentational' and 'philanthropic' emotion work later when discussing passionate youth work as resistance.

The demands of passionate youth work

Theories of emotional labour and emotion management help make sense of passionate youth work by pointing out that emotional work involves great effort and complexity, and yet is too often seen as something that comes naturally, particularly to women. Although emotional commitment was reflected amongst both women and men in my research, the caring side of youth work might traditionally be understood as women's

work while the more practical and disciplinary aspects would stereotypically be seen as the role of men. In the following quote, Quincie expresses some of the intense effort and deep reflection involved in working with her emotions:

> I'm such a massive character, such a massive personality, sometimes even within youth work it's overbearing, it's overcrowding, it's too much, it's too inviting, it's too open, it's, oh my goodness! […] You have to self reflect, everything that is required of you in terms of your work with young people you have to first be able to do it yourself, be completely honest with yourself [...] You have to honestly ask yourself, 'if that happens, how would I react, and if this happens?' And then depending on what you get back will determine the kind of work or how far you engross yourself within your role. […] Youth work throws a lot up about yourself, you know? (Quincie)

Here, Quincie expresses clearly (and passionately!) how she uses her personality and emotions in a complex and skilled way that goes beyond an instinctive use of self and requires deep reflection. Aware that she can be 'too much', she reflects on how she might be perceived and what she might do in different situations. This encompasses being 'honest' with herself and reflecting on how to use her personality most effectively. Several of the participants in this study spoke about their development as youth workers in terms of the deep emotional work involved:

> My persona now has changed […] It has to do with my shyness, I'm coming out of myself a bit more, I'm being more confident, just being able to communicate better […] One of the things that I really like about youth work is the debrief sessions that we have, where you're able to actually reflect on practice […] I'm a lot more laid back, a lot more relaxed […] I'm slowly being more confident, being more natural. (Ox)

Ox illustrates here that being 'natural' or genuine is not straightforward or automatic, but involves him in the hard work of reflection, which itself relies on an organisational commitment to making time available for meaningful staff debriefing sessions. The level of reflection that Quincie and Ox engage in constitutes skilled, intensive and challenging work that involves the *whole* self and interactions with colleagues. For many of the workers in this study, their care and concern for young people inevitably remains with them beyond their working hours:

> In the last few months round here there's been like 3 stabbings, on one estate. And that's just on their doorstep, where they live, and so it is – it's difficult […] It's always hard not to get too stressful with them and bring *your* personal feelings into things. (Forde)

> A lot of the time I struggle that I can't live their life for them. So I have to accept that they might do something that I would love them not to do. (Laura)

> … it's never fully done, is it? [...] And I never stop thinking, oh, I could have done more, I've met that young person for a coffee today and that's been really nice but [pause] how much – if I'd had more time I could have done more. (Tracey)

As Hochschild (2003) and Smith (1992; 2012) argue, difficult emotional work based on care tends to be under-rewarded and under-recognised, partly because it is associated with women's work and seen as being natural for women. I would add that there are other types of emotion work that are necessary for effective youth work and that are often seen as 'natural' for black and working-class workers, both male and female. Some of the work that youth workers seem to do as a matter of course involves complex emotional skills built up over years. 'Getting on with' young people who others see as 'difficult' or 'challenging', reaching those who are labelled 'hard to reach', coaxing a smile or a laugh from a teenager who is having a really bad day, remaining calm when pool cues are thrown, dealing with a smashed window or averting a fight – these skills are highly valued and necessary for youth workers. A part-timer who is said to be 'a natural' in these situations will be, very often, black and/or working-class. When emotional skill is associated with groups that have less power and status in the workplace, the level of skill is rarely reflected in the pay structure. As noted earlier, it is managerial and administrative skill (associated most closely with middle-class and white workers) that is most generously rewarded.

For the workers in this study, though, recognition was not only related to pay. They wanted to feel involved in decisions made about their work, and to know that they were listened to and treated as skilled and knowledgeable. This was not always the case, particularly for volunteers:

> Being a volunteer is quite liberating in the way that you are just able to kind of go in, do your thing, focus on the young people [pause]. But at the same time I'm frustrated with it because I've not got the opportunity to say, 'We should do this, we should take this forward and we should try this'. (Nicola)

Many of the grassroots face-to-face workers in this study felt somewhat marginalised, not only informally but also through their practical exclusion from the places where decisions were made and policies discussed. This was starkly experienced by Bridget

when her voluntary sector employer reduced her hours and changed her contract:

> When I went onto a sessional contract I wasn't allowed at meetings any more, I wasn't allowed at the away day any more. Because [colleague]'s a volunteer she isn't allowed at meetings. Now [different colleague]'s part-time, oh, she's not allowed any more.

As well as being excluded from meetings, several part-timers lacked access to other vital communication systems and training:

> Because I'm a sessional worker […] I am not considered as anybody, so no, my input's not really needed [...] It's things that have happened since I started with them as a volunteer. Not being involved in team meetings, not seeing me as someone worth paying me to do a certain amount of training, and that's what they're still doing now. (Zandra)

> Part-time staff didn't have access to the any of the computers so we couldn't log on, didn't have an email address, couldn't access the intranet... I thought part-time and full-time staff had to be given equal rights but we never had any of that. (Rachel)

> My initial training in youth work was very, very bad [...] I had no previous experience, and I found out, like, two or three years later that you're supposed to actually do an induction, which I didn't do [...] I had no training behind me so [...] I was more like a, when I look back, more like a bodyguard. (Ox)

These youth workers were highly committed and engaged in immensely challenging emotional work, and yet many were marginalised in their organisations. This marginalisation is based on a history of hierarchical staffing structures in which it is assumed that volunteers and part-timers turn up and hang out with young people, whilst full-timers hold the keys, the money and the information (Bolger & Scott, 1984). This is also a history of reproduced inequalities. As Ox told me, he felt he had been treated as a bodyguard; this echoes a history of black male youth workers employed to 'deal with' and discipline young black men (Williams, 1988; John, 1981; John & Parkes, 1984).

Many of the part-timers and volunteers in this study did feel appreciated, respected and listened to by their employers. However, the pattern of marginalisation seems to reinforce longstanding social and structural inequalities. Broadly, it could be argued that the youth work industry relies on the complex and under-rewarded emotional (and also physical and mental) labour of a largely working-class, female and black workforce. Money is made for organisations through this exploitation; as Zandra starkly expresses it: 'They just see me as someone who can get their work done but someone they can also

save money with'.

Emotions in a changing policy context

None of this is unrelated to the policy context discussed in the previous chapter. Emotion work is affected by multiple and changing influences including personal, organisational and professional norms (Bolton, 2005). Some of the interviewees found that cultures of accountability and monitoring caused stress, clouded their enjoyment, and affected their relationships with young people:

> There's a *lot* of politics involved, it's always those kinds of things. Lots of obstacles involved in terms of information sharing and all those bureaucracy and politics that's involved, sometimes it is emotionally draining and that's the downside to it to be honest. Cos one minute you can be really great and emotionally, you know, on a positive, and the next minute you can be really negative. (Mahad)

> At the back of all our minds was always these targets. As much as we tried to do really good youth work for what young people wanted, at the back of our minds it was always there […] And the young people even feel that. (Laura).

Hochschild's (2003) theory of alienated emotional labour might be of renewed relevance as youth work is influenced by the principles of the market and enterprise. Alongside direct private sector encroachments into youth work, organisations in the public and voluntary sectors are increasingly run on business lines (Davies, 2013; 2014). Young people benefit from the emotional labour of grassroots youth workers, and yet so (in many cases) do directors, senior managers, organisations and funding bodies: the income of organisations is partially reliant on the continuing emotional work of low-paid and unpaid workers such as those in my study.

The similarities between youth work and more commercial sectors should not be overstated. Organisational requirements for monitoring and targets clearly influence youth workers' emotions, but this cannot be equated with airline companies micro-managing the feeling displays of their workers. Unlike flight attendants, youth workers do not tend to be told exactly when and how to smile! However, we might wonder whether this is so far-fetched; some youth programmes are already measured using happiness indicators and well-being indexes (McGimpsey, 2013), and there has been a growth in methods such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming which teaches specific

techniques for building rapport such as the mirroring of body language.

When thinking about emotional commitment in youth work, there is a clear tension between the need for youth workers to care about and like young people, the stress that this caring can cause, and the potential for exploitation and marginalisation. Shifts in capitalism have resulted in both a homogenisation of work processes and a growing emphasis on emotional capacities (Gill & Pratt, 2008). There will always be the possibility for organisations to exploit and profit from the emotional labour of frontline youth workers, particularly in an increasingly marketised system, but this does not mean that workers should care less. It is clearly a good thing for young people to have youth workers who like them and find it enjoyable and satisfying to work with them, and grassroots workers' commitment could be seen and developed as a challenge to commodified and profit-oriented ways of valuing youth work. I will now explore this further.

Passion and resistance

Youth work employers benefit from a passionate workforce and might (intentionally or unintentionally) exploit their workers' commitment to young people by asking them to work longer and for less pay. On the other hand, loving and caring youth workers are not dupes, and their passion might make them *less* willing to comply with dehumanising systems. In this section I want to think about the relationship between passion and resistance in youth work and in particular how the grassroots youth workers in this study put young people at the centre of their work, providing space and time for young people to an extent that goes beyond what might be seen as cost-effective.

First I need to clarify what I mean by resistance in this context. Traditional critical scholarship defines resistance in broadly Marxist terms, as conscious class-based struggle that takes such forms as strikes, occupations and street protest. In recent decades, feminist and poststructuralist theorists have often taken a broader understanding of resistance to encompass everyday forms of action (Weitz, 2001**;** Barinaga, 2013; Seymour, 2006; Thomas & Davies, 2005a; 2005b; Ball, 2013). As I explained in the introduction, my approach throughout this thesis is to build on both of these understandings and to avoid privileging either organised or 'everyday' forms of

action. In this context I am defining resistance loosely as words, thoughts or actions that oppose the dominant neoliberal interpretations of youth work policy. In relation to passionate youth work, it seems important to recognise the top-down exploitative potential of employers over youth workers (and of workers over young people, although this is not my main focus here) as well as thinking about the potential for emotional commitment to be liberatory and subversive.

When the workers in this study discussed negative emotions in relation to youth work, they often differentiated between the stress and difficulty experienced in relation to direct work with young people and that which was caused by managerial or organisational demands. Rachel had recently left her job, and reflected on the contrast between these different kinds of challenge:

> I didn't ever not enjoy working with young people. Even when they were being difficult, I've never found I didn't enjoy that, because that is challenging, but it's still interesting, it's still working out how you're gonna work with them and overcome things. [Pause]. Towards the end I really stopped enjoying a lot of the things with my managers. That was really difficult.

Alan also emphasises the stress that can be caused for part-timers when they are not trusted, listened to or appreciated:

> I think the job's actually on the one hand incredibly complex and on the other hand quite simple […] it's all of this constant analysing and managing that pisses me off. It's like, 'Look, we turn up, we do our job, we do it well. Trust us'. And there's not much trust in part-time workers at all […] which then leads to resentment and then people *become* untrustworthy, because they're like, 'Well, I can't be bothered'. We never get any praise for anything, we never get any thanks for anything, we're the ones doing the bloody job.

The workers in this study were often critical of intrusive monitoring procedures, hierarchical management, increasing time pressures, funding cuts, redundancies and inappropriate performance targets. These concerns are discussed elsewhere in the thesis; here, I want to focus less on what youth workers are opposed to, and more on how their passion for working with young people forms part of an alternative to potentially dehumanising systems.

Putting people first

At this point it is helpful to return to Bolton's work on emotion management. Bolton (2005) proposes that there are four overlapping types of emotion management (see Table 5, page 114), of which I have already discussed two. Here I want to consider Bolton's (2005) 'presentational' and 'philanthropic' emotion management, which she argues provide spaces for being human and for resistance. 'Presentational' emotion management draws on Goffman's work on social interaction to argue that workers present themselves in ways that uphold or disrupt social and emotional norms. For example, they might engage in humour and play that can be seen as disruptive of efficiency and yet maintains positive friendly relationships. 'Philanthropic' emotional management refers to the possibility of giving 'a little extra' out of kindness and care. Bolton (2005, p.135) argues that there are unmanaged spaces in every organisation where workers are not necessarily governed by explicit guidelines, policies or managerial directives:

> Many forms of activity take place in these various spaces according to social feeling rules and people in organisations use them to create and maintain familial bonds, to relieve anger and anxiety, to register their resistance to demands made of them by management and to take time to offer extra emotion work as a gift to colleagues or customers and clients.

This analysis resonates with the accounts of grassroots youth workers. As their work becomes more regulated, there is a sense that even a hug can become a form of resistance:

> You know what I like? Somewhere in [employer's] protocol is that you mustn't be physical with young people. You know what I love? Young people come and they're like, *'Bridget!'* and I get big hugs! (Bridget)

In the space between an organisation's policy and the practical enactment of a relationship with a young person, the young person will often come first for a youth worker. If a young person decides to hug Bridget she (quite reasonably) joins in rather than stopping them. Similarly, she maintains relationships with young people who are no longer in her funding remit because they are over the age limit or have moved away:

> I break the rules. If [young woman] called me tomorrow, I'm gone. And she now lives in [a different borough] and I'm not supposed to work with her any more. If she calls me I'm sorry, I'm going. And I've done it before.

In using the phrase ‘I break the rules’, Bridget is clear that her decision to put young people first is a form of resistance. Her actions are consistent with definitions of youth work that emphasise relationships as *central* to the role rather than as a means to an end (Rodd & Stewart, 2009). While she is aware of requirements for professional conduct, Bridget enjoys the fluidity of her role:

> I love the fact that […] one day I'm a counsellor, then I'm a nurse, then I'm a teacher, then I'm a mother, then I'm an auntie, you know, it's amazing, the amount of different hats you have to wear doing [the employment project]. I love it.

Bridget follows emotional demands that are not encompassed by her organisation’s policies. Her approach could be defined according to Bolton’s (2005) typology as ‘presentational’ emotion management, the human requirement to maintain bonds and follow social norms rather than refusing a hug or breaking off a relationship for funding-related reasons. It could also be seen as ‘philanthropic’ emotion management because her relationships with young people are generous. They involve her in extra work (visiting young people outside of the area who do not ‘count’ against her targets) and encompass genuine enjoyment of young people’s company as well as care for their welfare.

It is clear that passionate youth work is not only restrictive and exploitative. Even in highly regulated workplaces, workers can undertake autonomous emotional action that 'serves to liberate them from management's control of their emotions and thereby alleviates some of their sense of estrangement' (Tolich, 1993, p.362). When Bridget spoke of breaking the rules in these ways, she seemed to do so with pride and satisfaction. In public and voluntary service work, such autonomous actions can be seen as enactments of personal and professional ethical integrity (Banks, 2009; 2011; Batsleer, 2008; Cribb, 2011). As Banks (2011, p.6) argues, a deep and genuine concern for human relationships 'mitigates against treating people as cases, consumers or numbers'.

Making space and taking time

Putting young people first is not merely a rhetorical aspiration; it involves making a commitment to spending time with them, and creating spaces where they feel welcome

and included. Although this might be assumed to be intrinsic to the youth work role, the growth of bureaucratic demands and pressure on resources means that both time and space are squeezed. Despite these challenges, some of the participants in this study work in places where space and time for young people remain a priority. Mickie works as a volunteer (and occasionally as a paid part-timer) in a project that works with young people who define themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans or Queer; such spaces are particularly important for this group, who are excluded from many other spaces:

> It's not unusual for people to say it's a kind of home from home, or a home where, you know, where they feel most safe, really. Cos a lot of our young people come here and they may not be out to friends and family. A lot of young people travel a fair distance […] People do come and join in and get involved with planning what we do, you know, so that's really important. Young people form it. And we've had a lot of progression from young people being young people to volunteers […] People stick with it [...] they stay here, or they dip in and out. (Mickie)

This idea of a 'home from home' calls up a place that is qualitatively and emotionally different to spaces typically found in the provision of more formal services for young people, and Mickie's centre does indeed have a feel of homeliness about it. A good youth work space is not only or always a comfortable setting; there is creativity and challenge there too.

Such spaces can be more difficult to achieve for workers in more traditional youth organisations, where institutional systems might be valued over feelings of homeliness. However, Alan, a part-timer working at a local authority youth club, was particularly assertive about creating as much space and time as possible for face-to-face practice with young people. Although his role included administrative responsibilities he made a principled decision to use his energies for direct work with young people rather than peripheral tasks. Historically, the youth clubs in his borough had been open only for specific sessions in the evenings, but along with his colleagues he had argued to adopt a more flexible approach where young people could drop in and use the space in the daytimes:

> We have kids in here like all the time, there'll probably be someone knocking on the door in a minute […] we have parents coming in chatting [...] We won't say 'Well, we're not open, you'll have to come back at such and such a time'. […] It's been happening for years, but it's been kind of like against the grain. And it's

> been, kind of, people have frowned upon it. And now it's becoming, people are just so much more confident and saying, 'Actually this is good youth work'.

Like Bridget, Alan is clear that his commitment to working with young people might be seen as rebellious in an organisational culture where bureaucracy often takes time away from direct work with young people. He is critical of full-time colleagues who do not allow young people into buildings because they have too much work to do; he keeps his own admin to a minimum, and if he needs to get on with something he lets young people in the building anyway to use the computers, keeping an eye on them while he gets on with whatever he needs to do.

> It's like, this is our job, the job is we work with young people [...] in the youth service the amount of hours worked face to face [...] would probably be about fifteen percent. And it's like, it should be at least eighty. What else can you be doing? What else is there to do? That's the job!

For the unpaid part-timers in the study, this emphasis on face-to-face work was often even more important. Those who were relatively free of administrative demands were able to spend most or all of their time working directly with young people.

> There was someone who used to come to see me and I'd spend 8 or 9 hours with her, all day. We'd go shopping together and I'd be with her all the time. She'd always phone and see where I was and come and see me. […] [Manager] always used to say to me, 'But what you're doing is exactly what she needs. […] You're being there for her' […] If you were to say that to your manager, how would he be able to record that you had actually achieved something just by spending all that time? I don't know. (Louise)

It seemed initially shocking to me – and puzzling to Louise herself - that she had been encouraged to spend so much time with one young person. But why should this be seen as a luxury? If the young person needed someone to spend time with and Louise was available, particularly as she was a volunteer, where was the problem? Clearly there are possibilities of over-dependency on the part of the young person or burn-out on the part of the youth worker, but a short-term investment of intensive time and energy might be just what this young person needed. It is almost as if the rationing of time and space has become endemic amongst youth workers so that we do it to ourselves. As Colley et al (2012) have found, time and space are becoming compressed and restricted in human service work more generally. They argue strongly that such work:

> should not be reduced to an industrial model of 'efficiency'; that alternative rationalities based on use-values of caring for people should prevail; and that use-values of control, whether over practitioners or over service users, should be opposed. (p.391)

Where youth workers insist on creating caring and welcoming spaces for young people, and are willing to spend the time it takes in working with them, they are using their passion in ways that resist managerial and profit-oriented ways of working. Clearly, understanding passion as resistance does not remove the potential for youth workers' emotional labour to be exploited, particularly if it is unsupported and unrecognised. It remains important for workers' organisations including trade unions to campaign for better recognition of emotional labour, but also to develop more understanding of the liberatory potential of resistance.

Conclusion: 'Because we love youth work we stand up for it'

Not just a job (2)

'Hey Ricky, there's a job for <u>you</u> in here!' They've finished in the job centre and are back at the café. Danny hands the local paper over to his youth worker, who reads out loud: 'Youth Hub operations manager. Must have extensive experience of negotiating contracts, liaising with key stakeholders, implementing a sustainable financial strategy and…' He breaks off, laughing. 'Danny, can you really see <u>me</u> getting that job?' Danny shrugs and says, 'I don't even know what half of it means.' 'Neither do I!' says Ricky, 'And I don't think I want to know. That's not what I'm in youth work for. But that's the way things are going now, that's the kind of person they want. Not someone like me.'

'Is that the kind of thing Jo does?' asks Danny, curious. Ricky chooses his words carefully. 'No, she's not a manager, she's part-time like me. She's just a bit better at the paperwork. Maybe she could go for that job if she wanted to.' He thinks for a moment. 'I can't see Jo in an office all day though. She'd end up having a big argument with them. Me, I wouldn't even apply. I hate paperwork, I'm dyslexic, I hate sitting in front of a computer.' He hands the newspaper back to Danny.

'Thanks but it's not for me. Anyway, we need to get going and see if we can find some money to buy you a smart shirt for your interview. Or shall we have another cuppa first?'

Although my research did not initially set out to focus on grassroots youth workers' love and passion for their work, these workers emotional commitment was a strong theme that seemed to overlap with their critique of dehumanising systems and policy frameworks. This was apparent in their everyday resistance and (for some) in their involvement in campaigns. As Callie said, 'Because we love youth work we stand up for it'. Callie had been running a youth club in a village hall that was threatened with closure.

> When I'm arguing with the council about why they should keep the youth club open, if they can see that I care about this, then, they are still human, there might be a little bit more chance […] they'll be like, 'Well, there's something she's seeing that we're not seeing'. And they might not agree with me in the end but at least they know that I've cared enough to try and fight for it.

I do not mean to argue that passion is *always*, *only* or *mainly* a form of resistance; being a passionate youth worker might mean conforming to the roles of care-giver in a welfare workplace and of good worker in a marketised system. Strike-breaking in human-orientated workplaces is often done in the name of care: 'it's not fair on the young people to shut the youth club for the night'. I do not mean to duck these tensions or argue that passion is inherently revolutionary, only to argue that it is just as important to explore passion's role in resistance as it is to think about the exploitative and conformist aspects of emotional labour and emotion management at work.

As welfare and education settings are infused with market principles and managerial practices, there is a growing potential for employers to exploit the emotional commitments of workers in the pursuit of profit. Hochschild (2003) explains how emotional labour might alienate workers from their emotions and complicate their feelings of love and passion for their work. By itself, however, this theory does not help workers decide what to do in practice. Young people need adults who genuinely care about them, and most employees want work that is fulfilling and enjoyable. Whatever the complex consequences for exploitation and resistance, it must also be emphasised

that youth workers' love for their work is important, satisfying and enriching in its own right.

Interviewed at a time of serious threat to both the nature and funding of their work, these workers feel that youth work brings its own rewards for themselves and for young people. They express an authentic love of youth work that calls into question or at least complicates the arguments of those who worry that there is little space for care and commitment in the current policy context (e.g. Jeffs, 2006; Ball, 2003; 2008b). Nobody is likely to feel passionate all of the time, and there will undoubtedly be some youth workers who do not feel passionate at all. However, the research participants' expressions of love for youth work were striking, and I cannot resist closing this chapter with some final quotations:

> I would love to continue to do youth work because I want to give back something to the community and to the young people and hopefully continue til the day that I haven't got the passion. (Mahad)
>
> I love every minute of the job that I do [...] I've met so many young people and met all the parents and you know, communities, it's a brilliant job! [Laughs]. (John)
>
> Tania: Thank you so much […] Is there anything else you want to say about anything?
> Callie: No. I love my job!

Chapter 5
'We're numbers, we've got to reach a target': Performativity and the authentic youth worker

Paperwork (1)

She looks out of the community hall window at the splashing puddles; apart from keeping us all dry, Jo thinks, this evening's been a waste of everyone's time. She'd booked the hall for a debate on the legalisation of drugs, something the young people have always discussed before without any encouragement, and had hoped to get them a quick certificate in time for the quarterly deadline. But hardly anybody turned up and those who did weren't interested. Now she's trying to persuade them to fill out the paperwork for the certificate anyway, which feels a bit fake. Jenna and Shay have only got as far as writing their names, and now they're whispering and laughing, looking over at Femi and Danny who have somehow got juice and crumbs all over their table and haven't made a start. Sadiq said he was going to the shop half an hour ago and hasn't come back.

Jo glances over at Ricky for support but he's as bored as the young people, checking his phone, distancing himself from her and from the whole thing. As if his job, like hers, didn't depend on getting these targets met. She knows she'll pretty much have to fill in the sheets herself; it's just a question of whether to do it now, with the token involvement of the young people, or later when they've gone. She feels a sharp irritation: at their manager for harassing them over their targets, at Ricky for refusing to help, at these young people for making things difficult, at the other young people for not being here, and at herself for going along with the whole charade. She breathes in slowly and gathers her energy for a final attempt: 'Come on then, do you want these certificates or not? Let's get this thing done and dusted!' She hears herself too loud and falsely cheerful, bounding across the room to tease, humour and cajole them all into getting it over with so they can all escape into the dark wet night.

Youth work monitoring and information systems have proliferated over the last two decades, transforming the nature of practice. They are justified by their supporters on the grounds of accountability, quality assurance, comparability and staff appraisal, and have become an everyday reality for youth workers to the extent that targets and outcomes have become normalised in youth work. This chapter will show that, despite this normalisation, target cultures are widely questioned and criticised by grassroots workers as an impediment to the quantity, quality and authenticity of their work with young people.

Target cultures and systematic monitoring technologies arrived in English youth work around the turn of the century during a time of increased investment under the New Labour government and particularly in the wake of the *Transforming Youth Work* policy document (DfES, 2002). By then, targets were already well embedded in schools, youth offending teams, social work and health care, adapted from the private sector as a key element of public sector managerialism (Gewirtz, 2002; Mooney & Law, 2007; Towers, 2011). These audit cultures have been renewed and reinvented under the Coalition Government despite claims about the sweeping away of 'red tape' (Conservative Party, 2009, p.8). This is because they were not only beneficial for New Labour's relatively state-centred system of neoliberal governance. They are also consistent with the Coalition Government's smaller welfare state because they enable comparison between providers, and thus make services 'legible for the market and private appropriation' (Lipman, 2013, p.2). In this way, neoliberalism (in the form of marketisation) and neo-conservatism (in the form of surveillance and control) can work together, as 'commodification and audit cultures tend to reinforce each other' (Apple, 2006, p.115). Audit and managerialism thus become hegemonic in today's neoliberal public services; they are used by all major political parties as a key element in the maintenance of neoliberalism through the general consent (or at least tolerance) of the population.

Youth work writers have argued compellingly that quantitative performance management and a focus on pre-planned outcomes are *particularly* inappropriate to youth work, which primarily draws on informal, open, person-centred and context-dependant methodologies (Fusco, 2013; Taylor & Taylor, 2013; Tiffany, 2011; Ord, 2014; Jeffs & Smith, 2008; Brent, 2004; Bunyan & Ord, 2012; Davies, 2005; IDYW,

2009). Targets are justified on the grounds of quality and accountability but research suggests that face-to-face youth workers are highly critical of targets and monitoring procedures (Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010; Spence & Devanney, 2006; Crimmens et al, 2004; Tiffany, 2007; 2011). These views are reflected by the grassroots youth workers in this study, who spoke with anger, frustration or resignation about tick-boxes, monitoring, targets, bureaucracy and admin: words used as shorthand for a wide range of performance management procedures.

This chapter aims to contribute to and extend these discussions by focusing on the everyday experiences, feelings and resistance of part-time and volunteer youth workers in relation to audit and target cultures, drawing on theories of performativity. In critical education policy studies, performativity refers to how performance management technologies change not only *what we do* but also *who we are*, our workplace identities and emotions. In his 2003 article, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity', Stephen Ball argues that systems of regulation employ judgements and comparisons as a means of control and change. In these systems, employees are required to monitor and improve their own performances and those of the people they work with. Performative systems in youth work can obstruct the building of mutual and trusting relationships which start from young people's interests, experiences and wishes, and may have the indirect effect of encouraging workers to favour those young people who are most compliant in relation to fulfilling the requirements of the audit (Tiffany, 2011). They can also change more subtly *what it feels like* to be a youth worker, often engendering a sense of dislocation and inner conflict.

This chapter has three sections. In the first I will explore how targets, outcomes and excessive bureaucracy are coming to saturate the everyday lives of grassroots youth workers, drawing on material from my study alongside theoretical work on performativity as it has been developed by Ball and other education scholars. Targets, tick boxes and paperwork are seen by many interviewees as obstructive and demeaning of authentic relationship-based work with young people. Measurement systems do not seem to reflect real youth work, and this creates a clash that challenges how grassroots workers see themselves; this is the focus of the second section. For some, the clash seemed to augur a sense of shame – both when they complied with inappropriate

systems, and when they failed to meet their targets. In reflecting on shame and authenticity, I continue to draw on Stephen Ball's work as well as on a different strand of performativity theory from feminist, queer and gender studies, particularly the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

In both its education policy and gender interpretations, performativity is primarily conceived of as restrictive and limiting of the diverse expressions of self. As in other chapters, I am interested in exploring these restrictions while also thinking about elements of everyday resistance and contestation. Resistance is particularly challenging in a context where cuts, commissioning and 'payment by results' mean that refusal or avoidance of performance technologies can risk the loss of jobs and projects, sometimes even the closure of entire organisations. In the third section I consider whether claims for authentic, open and informal youth work constitute counter discourses in themselves, as well as reflecting on how some youth workers create spaces and times that - while never being free of performative mechanisms - are somewhat less governed by them.

Youth work and performativity

One of the problems with target cultures is that there is rarely a straightforward relation between how well a worker 'performs' and the usefulness or importance of the result. Doing qualitative research can be similarly unpredictable. My interview with Forde was the briefest in the study: she had repeatedly changed the place and time of our appointment and I had waited in the wrong place for an hour in the sun, developing a headache and a bad mood. I liked her when we finally met, but was not sure whether the interview had gone particularly well. However, if I could use only one quotation to discuss performativity in youth work it would be this one:

Tania:	Do you identify yourself as a professional?
Forde:	Yeah! I do.
Tania:	Yeah? Can you explain why?
Forde:	Um (pause). I have standards. When I'm at work, I'm not Forde from home, I'm not Forde that has my home hat on. I'm Forde that comes to work, that yes, unfortunately we have to comply to standards, figures, numbers, that's what we are. We're numbers, we've got to reach a target, that is what we do. Unfortunately. If

> for a month we got ten young people but then two of those young people went through to start college, or started an apprenticeship, that still wouldn't be good enough sometimes. It needs to have all ten of them. And it is figures, it's just targets, you've got to hit targets. So I do see myself as a professional in the sense that I come here, and you know, I wear the face of [borough] I guess.

Forde spoke with equanimity about the need to 'comply'; this did not seem to be a complaint, but rather an acceptance of targets as unfortunate but inevitable (Wilkins, 2011). She explains her professionalism as an embodied shift from her 'home hat' to a 'local authority face'; once she has put on this face, targets become both what she does and who she is: 'standards, figures, numbers, *that's what we are*. We're numbers, we've got to reach a target*, that is what we do'* (emphasis added). This intersection between performance management and workers' understandings of themselves is a product of what is known in critical education policy sociology as performativity (Ball, 2001; 2003; 2008b; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Tiffany, 2011; Keddie, 2013; Lumby, 2009; Rich & Evans, 2009; Wilkins, 2010; Mulcahy, 2011). As Stephen Ball (2008b, p.52) puts it, 'The effects of performativity 'are to alter our working practices, our goals and satisfactions *and our identities* – our sense of who we are at work'.

Cultures of performativity create the conditions for what grassroots youth workers do and what they cannot do, who they are and who they cannot be. Drawing on work by Lyotard and Foucault, Stephen Ball (2001; 2003; 2008b; Ball & Olmedo, 2013) identifies performativity as a policy technology that relies on and creates the self-governing worker and organisation, compelled and incited by systems of control and comparison. In youth work, these systems often come in such forms as targets, outcomes measures, inspections and the presentation of the self and the organisation, some of which I have outlined in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Performative technologies in youth work

- Monthly, quarterly and annual targets (e.g. 'recorded and accredited' outcomes, 'entry into employment, education or training')
- 'Before and after' statistical outcomes measures (e.g. well-being and self-esteem scales, bespoke surveys)
- Payment by results
- Databases that 'track' young people's participation, outcomes and progress against targets
- Comparative league tables, 'naming and shaming'
- Inspections (Ofsted, local authority, funder, youth inspectors, managerial)
- Financial and monitoring audits and visits by contracting authorities
- Worker time sheets, self-assessments, supervisions, appraisals
- Web pages, annual reports, other publicity
- Spoken reports to meetings: team, inter-agency, external
- Other 'evidence' of youth work: sign-in sheets, photographs, art work, young people's evaluations, case studies

These technologies create information about the performance of workers and organisations that is then used to measure, compare and judge their work. In this way the technologies are an effect of hierarchical and marketised power relations, while also reinforcing and reproducing these relations. In performative systems it is not the production of adequate models of understanding that 'count', but the production of new work and fresh ideas, the maximisation of productivity (Lyotard, 1979). Change does not flow unproblematically from practice to representation because 'rendering something auditable shapes the processes that are to be audited' (Rose, 1996, p.351; Power, 1994) and thus practice begins to be oriented towards the demands of target cultures (Mulcahy, 2011; Tiffany, 2011). This is not to say that any and all representations of youth work are necessarily damaging, or that practice should never be challenged or changed: for example, young people's spoken or written evaluations can give workers ideas for improving their practice in line with what participants want, and show young people that their views are important. In contrast, the use of high-stakes performative mechanisms such as quantitative targets has often re-orientated practice towards individualised and surveillant technologies that fail to encompass the perspectives and experiences of young people and grassroots workers.

Target cultures mandate the grounds on which practitioners are judged; and ‘since performativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right’ (Lyotard, 1979, p.46). If the database says I have not met my target, I must be in the wrong. Where monitoring systems represent the worth of an individual or organisation, one crucial issue is who controls the field of judgement (Ball, 2001). Apple (2006) emphasises the role here of the professional and managerial middle-class, who may be politically liberal but provide the technical expertise that enables the proliferation of audit systems. Unequal systems of judgement and comparison have long been a feature of organisational life, but continuous audit places more value on displays of competence, which tend to be classed, gendered and racialised (Lumby, 2009). People for whom performance, audit and appraisal are familiar and 'natural' are most able to demonstrate competence through successful, almost effortless performances, and certain ways of working (which could be seen as predominantly middle-class, white and male) become the norm by which everybody is judged (Lumby, 2009; Apple, 2006). Grassroots youth workers are more likely than their managers to be working-class, female, dyslexic and/or black; they may be less likely to find audit systems natural and familiar, and may also be less likely to be perceived as competent in relation to these systems.

Audit and target cultures have been introduced into youth work through various local and national policy and funding mechanisms, the most significant of which was the New Labour policy document *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES, 2002). This policy heralded a lasting change requiring performance indicators, known colloquially as the 'REYS' outcomes, as compulsory targets for English local authorities (Smith, 2002a; Lehal, 2010). Targets and outcomes quickly became normalised as measures of the quality and competence of youth services and workers. Local authorities bought in computer software to monitor the performance of individuals and teams (see also Chapter 6), and pre-existing qualitative evaluation mechanisms were swept away as workers struggled to keep up with the growing weight of administration. The ‘REYS’ outcomes - reach, participation, recorded outcomes and accredited outcomes – became non-mandatory in 2009 and yet remain a high-stakes performance mechanism in many local authorities. They are referred to by workers throughout this chapter so require some explanation here.

Table 7: REYS (Resourcing Excellent Youth Services) outcomes

Reach	Number of 13-19 year olds in the local population in contact with youth services.
Participation	Percentage of that age group who participate regularly in youth services. In practice, regular attendance is often equated to attending more than four times in a year.
Recorded outcomes	Percentage or number of participants who achieve an outcome or change through their participation in youth services that is recognised by a youth worker and the young person themselves. The aim is to record subjective changes such as improvements in confidence or behaviour. In practice, the target is often met by a young person and/or youth worker filling in a form to state that the young person has participated in an activity or learnt a practical skill.
Accredited outcomes	Percentage or number of participants who achieve an outcome that is accredited by a recognised national body. This encompasses a wide array of qualifications including first aid, Duke of Edinburgh Awards and Youth Achievement Awards. In practice, the most popular accreditation in many organisations is an AQA basic skills certificate.

(Sources: DfES, 2002; Smith, 2002a; Lehal, 2010; interviews; own experience)

The above 'REYS' benchmarks, particularly recorded and accredited outcomes, remain significant in the lives of many youth workers employed or funded by local authorities. Youth work evaluation may have been patchy in the past but at least tended to be context-dependant, included qualitative as well as quantitative methods, and emphasised young people's views. Now only quantifiable measures count, and voluntary organisations are encouraged to buy in 'bespoke' tools such as New Philanthropy Capital's Well-being Measure (NPC, 2012; McGimpsey, 2013). Meanwhile, even smaller organisations that cannot afford such technologies (or do not want to use them) are nevertheless affected by the assumption that youth work's value must be 'proven'. The workers' co-operative that I am involved in, Voice of Youth, was set up partly to avoid funding that involves surveillant and time-consuming monitoring procedures; however, funders are increasingly unwilling to hand over even relatively small amounts

of money on trust.

> One of our funders gives us £1500 per year towards our insurance, refreshments for the young people and travel expenses for volunteers. In the past this has been granted on a relationship built up over years, and we have reciprocated with informal contact and an annual report and accounts. Now they have told us that we need to enter the personal details of all young people we work with on a database to provide 'evidence' of who we are working with. This does not seem a good use of our time as volunteers, and we are concerned about confidentiality. We are engaged in discussions between ourselves, with young people and with the funder. Our instinct is to say no, but we are worried we will lose this funding as a result, money that we rely on for our core costs and that would be difficult to replace.
>
> (Research diary, April 2014)

The burden of monitoring can fall on volunteers and part-timers in small organisations, whereas meeting targets in larger organisations and youth services is usually the responsibility of managers and senior administrators who are increasingly required to perform a complex set of procedures. As a result, employers value high-level administrative skills over youth work experience when recruiting senior staff. Many grassroots workers understandably resent having managers who do not understand youth work and yet appear highly rewarded.

Diana:	The managers at the [hub], none of them have come from a youth work background. [...]
Keiron:	We had the CEO who was a graduate in fashion. […] it was like she didn't know what she was doing.
Diana:	Yep, was she on 60 odd grand?
Keiron:	Yeah, the wage, yeah.
Diana:	I remember, and she used to come into work dressed in like tight shirts and tight pencil skirts, to a youth club, to a session on an evening […]
Keiron:	Never spoke to young people, never spoke to young people.

Where organisations employ business-orientated managers it is difficult for part-timers and volunteers to relate to them or learn from them, let alone to imagine attaining a senior role themselves. Even where managers are from youth work backgrounds, as is more often the case in local authorities, their heavy administrative workloads remove them from the practice arena:

> A full-time worker said to me, 'There might be some sessions whereby I will be stuck in the office, I won't be able to be out with the young people in the session'. I'm thinking to myself, 'You can't lock yourself in an office, at a computer, really'. I didn't mention it. Because I thought it would be a little bit out of order, 'How can you do that?' But I thought, being a full-time worker, surely you should be able to engage with young people, otherwise you're just an administrator then, aren't you? (John)

Although they might feel wary of questioning the situation, part-timers are disappointed when their experienced colleagues do not have time to work alongside them. Managers are often making well-meaning attempts 'to protect the part-time staff from paperwork in order to maximise the time they can spend with young people' (Spence & Devanney, 2007, p.111), although the pressures tend to trickle down to grassroots level in any case:

> Here they *do* have a *lot* of targets. [...] You don't really sort of get a huge disciplinary over it or anything like that. That's really just the full-time workers. Part-time workers don't face that, at all. But we kind of face the pressures of it as part-time workers cos the full-timers come and go, 'Right, we got our targets, we have to meet four hundred young people this year'. You're thinking, 'Hold on a minute! (Laughs) Where did this come from? Last week we were just going out and enjoying ourselves, you know, where's this come from?' […] I had a supervision last week and the full-time worker said 'We have this many, we have this target of young people', I think it was like a thousand accreditations to meet within a year. For two centres. (John)

Like many grassroots workers, John respects his managers and wants to support them, even though he finds the targets questionable and unrealistic. As part of the placement for his university youth work degree he was given the task of filling in the local authority monitoring database, and despite criticising its surveillance aspects he seemed proud to do this; it was a symbol that he was trusted and perceived as competent. In this way, the completion of performative tasks becomes (for some) a matter of satisfaction (Ball, 2003). Not only does it feed into the entrepreneurial project of the self (Rose, 1996), it is also rewarded with resources for young people.

> We got some money from the council and I was amazing and hit all my targets! (Callie)

Callie mentioned this success with a modest smile and yet was genuinely and understandably proud to have met her targets – she had demonstrated her own competence, and as a result secured further funding to continue a project that had initially been short-term. Like John, she is a relatively new worker hoping to broaden

her own skills and experience and make a career in youth work, and once again was given the responsibility of entering young people's details and achievements on her local authority's monitoring database. She did this willingly at home after work in her own time, and seemed invested in the achievements of her own team (based on a mobile youth bus) in relation to – and perhaps even competition with - the local youth centres.

Callie:	We've got team targets [...] they've got [youth centre] targets, we've got the mobile team target. But in each area we're also trying to get ten accredited, seven recorded outcomes. [...] Contact and participation we don't worry about, because on the bus we smash [youth centre A] and [youth centre B] cos we're in so many areas (laughs).
Tania:	You get a lot of contacts.
Callie:	We get a lot of contacts.
Tania:	And what about, how do you find the other targets?
Callie:	They're a bit hard. It depends on your group. […] We're there one time a week, and if they don't want to engage or they're having a horrible day or something's wrong with the bus or they don't want to come on we can't do it. It's more difficult to get them coming back to us because we're not there permanently. [...]
Tania:	What do *you* think about targets?
Callie:	I hate targets! With a vengeance. Because there's some things that you can't measure in targets.

It is symptomatic of the peculiar allure of targets and outcomes measurements that we can recognise their inappropriateness while at the same time finding them strangely satisfying. Callie is proud when the youth bus 'smashes' the contact numbers of the local youth centres and yet she hates targets 'with a vengeance'; she expresses both pride and disgust in relation to these systems and her role in them.

Workers' pride and sense of achievement helps to instil and reinforce unpopular target cultures because:

> Performativity works best when it is inside our heads and our souls. That is, when we do it to ourselves, when we take responsibility for working hard, faster and better as part of our sense of personal worth and the worth of others. And it is important to recognise that it also offers us the possibility of being better than we were or even being the best – better than others. (Ball, 2008b, p.52).

Performativity in these accounts is not outside of us. It becomes part of us even as we criticise it, even if we tell ourselves that we do not care. I use the word 'us' here because I cannot place myself outside of these paradoxical feelings of pride and shame in relation to monitoring mechanisms. The following research diary extract is from when I

worked in a voluntary sector organisation funded by the local authority:

> Today's session was inspected by the local council (who fund us) with a few hours' notice. I am too stubborn to adapt the session plan and I guess it went ok despite this, but I felt flat afterwards. There was nothing useful or helpful in the feedback, and little recognition of the good and difficult work we are doing. I do not care what they think. Or maybe I do care. I care, I suppose, that we only got 'satisfactory' for equal opportunities, when I feel that anti-oppressive practice is one of our strengths. I am irritated that our only 'outstanding' was for 'young people's attainment', presumably because I handed out some almost worthless AQA certificates that had arrived that morning in the post. I am annoyed with myself for wasting emotional energy thinking about any of this, embarrassed that some part of me wants to succeed according to criteria I disagree with. I seem to want to be a rebel and to be outstanding; a maverick who does not care about inspections but does well in them anyway.
>
> (Research diary, July 2011)

Being a youth worker today means working with young people on a genuine level, while also creating moments of inspection and systems of monitoring that rely on a different regime of judgement. Perhaps we can hardly complain if we are not judged as excellent in systems that are not congruent with our beliefs; we cannot expect recognition from others if our aim is to be true to ourselves (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). And yet, I am not sure whether there is any escape. We might criticise target cultures, but it is difficult - perhaps impossible - to escape the meanings they impose.

Part-timers are not wholly captured by the discourses of target cultures. They told me articulately about young people and groups who had developed, achieved and changed through their involvement in youth work; 'real' changes that were difficult to translate into the monitoring systems used by their employers or funders. And yet, they could not ignore these mechanisms:

> Things that I don't so much enjoy, is the kind of numbers game of having to tick boxes. (Mickie)

> All the projects went out the windows, and it was basically accredited training, bums on seats, let's get paid for numbers. (Sarah)

These specific phrases - 'numbers game', 'tick box', and 'bums on seats' – were used consistently and repeatedly by youth workers across the country and in different roles and organisations. Like the similarly all-encompassing word 'paperwork' (Spence & Devanney, 2006, p.116), they are used as a shorthand for a wide range of

administrative, performative and bureaucratic activity. Perhaps workers employ this language as a means of downplaying tasks that feel unreal, inappropriate, damaging or demeaning. 'Numbers game' seems particularly apposite, emphasising both the quantitative nature of monitoring mechanisms and their inauthenticity. 'Gaming' refers to the more-or-less honest manipulation of data to fit required outcomes. It is not an accidental or unintended by-product of imperfect monitoring systems, but rather a consequence of performative technologies. Performativity involves an almost inevitable element of fabrication:

> Fabrications are versions of an organisation (or person) which does not exist – they are not 'outside the truth' but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts – they are produced purposefully in order to be accountable. Truthfulness is not the point – the point is their effectiveness... their transformational and disciplinary impact. (Ball, 2003, p.224)

Part of the 'game', then, is to know which fabrications are desirable and which are unacceptable. Workers are kept guessing: how far should the truth be pushed and bended? Should we prepare a special session when the inspectors are due? Should we add a young person's name to the attendance list if they only popped in for a moment? Should we share our doubts and false starts at a neighbourhood meeting, or focus only on achievements? Knowing which compromises are acceptable and which are straying too far from the truth requires a deep and habitual familiarity with systems of judgement. These games are complicated; cheating is frowned upon, but providing wholly honest versions will not make the grade. In repeated accounts, workers were told by colleagues and managers that targets *must* be met, or jobs and projects would be at risk. The implication is that meeting the target is the important thing, that *how* it is met is less important; there is an idea of earned autonomy, that as long as you fulfil your targets, you are free to work in any way you choose (Wilkins, 2011). Workers and volunteers are incited through fear, competition and the possibility of self-fulfilment to 'be creative', even when this means implementing systems of measurement that detract from genuinely developmental relationships with young people. Since the introduction of targets for accredited outcomes (see Table 7, page 136) the certificate for boiling a kettle or making a cup of tea has been widely discussed amongst youth workers. I had wrongly assumed such stories were apocryphal, but these certificates actually exist:

Louise: In the youth clubs though they want you to accredit the kids for everything […] There's certain things that are really good, we did a first aid course and that's amazing, that's a really good useful thing to do, and the cooking thing's good. But accrediting them for boiling the kettle I don't.

Tania: Is that serious or are you joking?

Louise: No, no, no, no, that's not me joking, that's serious, you can. There's a huge database of all the different things you can accredit and that's one of them.

Tania: And have you ever accredited someone for boiling a kettle?

Louise: I haven't but I know other people have [but] if I worked in a centre and the centre was going to be closed or not if you did these things then I guess I probably would […] then you probably would do anything you could, and picking the easiest accreditations are probably better, so I guess that's why they do it. But yeah, I do think some of them are just stupid and pointless. And it's just a tick box exercise and isn't actually youth work.

Few youth workers entirely opposed accreditation, but they questioned how appropriate it is in settings which aim to be informal, fun, experience-based, and often attended by young people who have already been at school or college all day. Several workers mentioned first aid as an accredited course that carries genuine value, but it is also costly, requires specialised tutors, and can only be done once by each young person. Few workers could meet their targets only through courses they saw as worthwhile, hence the widespread and often reluctant use of AQA unit awards in a variety of subject areas.[14] Even though making a cup of tea may be a useful life skill, the actual skill here seems diminished by its accreditation; it is possible to imagine a young person saying proudly that they'd learned at youth club how to make a good cuppa, but it feels less likely that they would be proud of having a certificate for this skill, or that employers would look favourably at a CV that included this qualification. The 'cup of tea' AQA is the epitome of the tick box exercise, seen by workers as inappropriate, worthless and demeaning of young people's more notable achievements.

> My line manager had said to me, 'Lorne, you're not meeting, you need to get more recorded and accredited outcomes down' […] she's like, 'without the numbers you won't be able to keep your job', basically. […] I did a lot of resisting and then I didn't do so much resisting, and I thought 'Ok, I'd better do some numbers'. […] And she goes, 'You know there's a recorded outcome for making a cup of tea?' I said, 'You're having a laugh, aren't you?' […] I was so shocked that I printed it out and stuck it to my wall, and I was like, this is the

14 Awarding body AQA boasts over 23000 unit awards, which it claims are used by hundreds of youth services (AQA, 2014), including unit 83522 'Making tea or coffee' (validated 1999).

> ludicrous-y that we're working in, that there's an accredited outcome for making a cup of tea. […] I mean the lunacy of all of this, right, the absolute ridiculousness, is that this pressure from them is alongside me reaching record numbers in that youth project of young people attending, of making national links with organisations and doing projects of a national scale [...] My young people stood on the stage in front of government ministers and the head of the education authority [...] and they're going, 'You need to get them doing cups of tea accreditations'. (Lorne)

Lorne's work at a local authority LGBT youth centre could be seen as highly successful according to its impact and attendance figures, but he was falling behind on targets and thus required to engage with practices he saw as ludicrous. This is reminiscent of Jeremy Brent's (2004) critique of accreditation targets, in which he reflects on his experiences in a Bristol youth club. In one story, a young woman smiled for the first time after many months of disengaged attendance at the club; in another, young people built a decorative metalwork arch to remember youth club members who had died. Brent argues that these meaningful youth work 'outcomes' would have been difficult to accredit, and that even if it were possible he would not have wanted to do it: 'Accreditation in this context would have been demeaning... We could surmise the learning outcomes of the young people involved, but that feels almost sacrilegious' (Brent, 2004, p.71).

In this way, performative systems seem to undermine grassroots youth workers' feelings of authenticity. Meanwhile, those who call for accountability in the form of targets, outcomes and payment by results insist that youth work must prove its effectiveness, and even its existence. This view is reinforced through everyday talk, such as when youth workers say something to young people along the lines of, 'Could you fill in this form? We need to prove we're really working with you.' It seems bizarre that a piece of paper or a database record should have more status than actual activities and relationships. In performative systems, everybody - those who create and impose targets and outcomes, and those who oppose them - makes their claims in relation to what is 'real'.

I do not mean to argue that there is no need for accountability; perhaps the question is who youth workers should be accountable *to*. Most youth workers will know a small number of colleagues who are unreliable, do not seem to make an effort, or worse;

workers who are not sufficiently accountable to young people, to their colleagues, to the community, or to the field of youth work. The spectre of the 'bad youth worker' may be exaggerated but it casts shame on the youth work identity and sometimes wins grassroots support for reform. Quincie's youth service employer was being restructured when I interviewed her, and she expressed enthusiastic support for this change even though it would lead to cuts in services and threatened her own job:

> The informality of youth work, I think the resistance, and the informality in youth work, resides in the laziness, and I firmly believe this, resides in the laziness of the worker. Does not want to work, essentially. […] Within youth work now you've got your support staff, who do have their day jobs and they're tired, they're knackered and they're just sitting in the corner and don't youth work [...] You've just come in for a pay cheque (laughs) you know, essentially. So what's happening with youth work now eliminates all those people, basically what it is doing is shaking all the weeds off and that's what they've done. Youth work is a dusty old rickety thing that they've clawed out of the closet [...] and this is the dusting off process, literally, and everything that's falling off (pause), urgh, it's what's falling off.

Quincie spoke with disgust when she equated old-fashioned youth work with lazy 'support staff' (her fellow part-timers) who only come in for a pay cheque. If such cases are true, they may themselves be a legacy of long-term disinvestment and neglect. It is not my intention in this chapter to think about what should be done in these situations, but I do want to bring into question the assumption that time-consuming and surveillant monitoring systems should be imposed as a normalised disciplinary technology. The alleged ‘ineffectiveness’ of the minority seems to justify a 'dusting off process' of performance-related cuts and redundancies in which workers and teams are found wanting, removed and never replaced. Sometimes this is a way of removing ineffective staff without having to provide support or go through disciplinary procedures - good workers are often lost as 'collateral damage', and those who remain are fearful and insecure. Organisational restructuring has become a periodic feature of life in nearly all youth work bodies; austerity and the cry of ‘value for money’ justify further performative measures. There is a line of argument that sees youth work (in Quincie's words) as a 'dusty old rickety thing' that should be ashamed of its past and embrace the new age of targets and insecurity. This view is expressed (for example) by a youth service manager interviewed for research by Davies and Merton (2009, p.26):

> Performance targets have been saviours of us given our past history of failure. We need to evidence, not just deliver.

Those who escape this year's round of cuts may breathe a cautious sigh of relief and return to work with renewed incentive to be obedient and play the game. And yet, there is a shame and guilt in remaining when others have gone, as well as in performing according to criteria that feel 'fake', in betraying the ideals of youth work. In the next section, I think more about issues of identity, recognition, authenticity and shame, continuing to work with performativity as it is discussed in education policy sociology while also drawing on ideas from theorisations of gender performativity.

Authenticity, shame and the youth worker identity

> The amount of times that admin and shit like that, excuse my language but it's *shit*, gets in the way of detached.[15] Like when me and Bridget do it, because we both have so much admin, and a lot of times it's, 'I just need to finish this, oh no it's a dash, we need to go out!' (Laura)

Laura spoke with anger and frustration as she expressed the practical time and effort of a heavy administrative burden, particularly as a part-time worker, and her emotional response to engaging in work that she experiences as 'shit'. It is interesting that this particular word, alongside 'crap' and 'bullshit', was frequently used by workers in relation to monitoring and administrative procedures. Perhaps this is a coincidence, or perhaps these words are chosen because they suggest a lack of sense, a waste, something that is dirty and perhaps even disgusting. Throughout the study, workers' linguistic choices, gestures and facial expressions suggested their disdain for some of the monitoring procedures commonly used in youth work. Recorded and accredited outcomes (see Table 7, page 136) came under particular criticism. Accredited outcomes have already been discussed in relation to the AQA in making a cup of tea. Recorded outcomes were designed to complement accreditation and recognise qualitative changes in young people's lives that might not lead to a certificate. Although they were an attempt to capture more subtle changes, once made into a performance target they were operationalised on a local level as a standardised form to be filled out and signed by youth worker and young person. High targets for recorded outcomes in many youth

15 Street-based youth work

services meant that even well-attended and well-regarded projects might need to engage in tactical practices, as Alan discusses here.

> Alan: I did one yesterday in rap vocals for someone who's blatantly been able to rap for ages, but apparently he's done it in this session! Even though you've already done that one last year. [...]
> Tania: So do you always, you do sort of tend to record something actual?
> Alan: I do actually do it, yeah, yeah. […] Otherwise you're just gonna be making stuff up, and it's all made up anyway but it's like, well, where do you stop? So I prefer to actually do it so it's meaningful, slightly. Even if that means I, we, we don't even get fifty percent of our targets on outcomes. We hit everything else, by a mile. But we know that we don't get them because they're bullshit. Kids don't want them. And they're not aimed for the sort of work that we do. […] You sit down with a kid and you have a really meaningful conversation with them and you're like, 'Now can you fill in this sheet and tell me-', it's like it completely undermines everything that you've just done. [...] 'You've only just had that conversation with me about my life and the different issues I've got at the moment so you can record it? So it looks like you're a decent youth worker? Is that it?' It's, yeah, bullshit. (Alan)

This conversation is rich with references to the real (actual, meaningful, blatant) and the unreal (made up, looks like, bullshit). In his dilemmas around authenticity, Alan understandably finds it preferable to write up an outcome that is 'meaningful, slightly' (something that really happened, even if it did not necessarily demonstrate new development) rather than risk a relationship by producing a piece of paper at the wrong moment. Even when the actual outcome is genuine, filling in a form can turn a ‘meaningful conversation’ into a commodity to be counted, and the youth worker becomes *less* authentic in the young person's eyes and in their own. Alan suggests a sense that these forms cannot adequately describe or represent the good work that he is *actually* doing, and yet despite his compromises he is still failing to meet some of his targets. In this account, what is meaningful and what is made up seem to become intermingled – a mingling that is particularly uncomfortable for grassroots youth workers, who tend to attribute great value to being genuine and honest:

> I love youth workers. I think they're a special breed. […] There's something, like, genuine about a lot of youth workers. (Laura)

> We are just genuine grassroots people who want to work with young people and have got that passion, and we're not ones for bragging. And I just think that's the nature of us. (Leo)

Tania: Anything else you think's important about youth work, or your work?
Forde: To be honest. Be honest with young people. Be very honest with them. Don't promise them the world and give them a cup of water. Don't. It's not good.

To think more about the role of authenticity in the youth work identity, it is useful to think about performativity from a different angle as it has been developed in relation to gender and sexuality, particularly by Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick (2003) explains how gender performativity derives from the work of J.L. Austin (1976), who is also the source of Lyotard's writing on performativity. A philosopher of language, Austin proposed categories of spoken language in which performative utterances *do* an action rather than describing or referring to that action; examples of this are sentences including the words 'I apologise', 'I dare you' or 'I promise'. Later in his career, Austin argued that speech acts should not be categorised as either performative or descriptive, because every speech act contains elements of both (Sedgwick, 2003). Tracing performativity in relation to subjectivity, Sedgwick (2003) characterises Derrida as arguing that the interesting aspect of this is that *all* language is performative, and Butler as building on Derrida's work to emphasise that performativity is at its *most* effective when it is *least* explicit, including in performance itself. Although it has a different emphasis, this is consistent with the interpretation of performativity already discussed; as form-filling becomes intrinsic to youth work, the worker and young person might begin to recognise themselves in (or as) what can be counted, written down, compared and ticked off – even as they say and feel that this is not the case.

Butler initially outlines her theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and continues to clarify and develop it in subsequent work (1997; 2004; 2006). She argues that gender, sex, desire and subjectivity are created and restricted by iterative acts, discourses (both words and action) which regulate how it is possible to be. In this sense boundaries are created around what we can and cannot be, placing us in relation to a 'norm'. Our performances are never entirely freely chosen, and even by identifying and acting against gender norms (for example, as gay, trans, queer or bi) we still exist in relation to what is seen and created as 'normal' (Butler, 1997). Butler uses this argument to challenge gender and sex essentialism, arguing that performance is all:

> There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results. (Butler, 2006, p.34)

If we can replace 'gender' with 'youth work' in this sentence (and I will discuss in a moment whether we can) it might be important to question whether there is such a thing as a genuine youth work identity which would blossom if only these inauthentic monitoring systems would go away. Passionate and caring attachments to youth work – as discussed in the previous chapter - are *also* performances that we create and recreate, perhaps by imitating other youth workers, or in response to our own past experiences of encountering professionals who do and do not seem to 'really' care. The accounts that youth workers gave me - and the accounts I give myself – are, in themselves, performances, even when they make claims on what is and is not real.

> You know the kind of youth work community meetings where everybody sits together with what they're doing with young people and so on, I just thought, this is a farce! It's just going round and round and especially when you're part-time, the frustration is, I can either be a youth worker, or I can attend meetings. And I can't attend your meetings because they're rubbish. And it's just a voice of you telling us everything's going brilliantly and that's not *real.* (Tracey)

When Tracey talks here about meetings, she is at the same time giving an account of herself – her claims to what is and is not 'real' are performative. I am not arguing that claims to authenticity are meaningless or wrong; I recognise what Tracey is talking about here, and I agree with her. However, it seems useful to remind myself – especially as somebody who uses authenticity claims and is attracted to them - that these, too, should be subjected to scrutiny. Reading about performativity as a policy technology, my intuitive interpretation was that target and audit cultures undermine and remove the 'true' nature of youth work based on relationships and centred on young people's everyday lives. As well as romanticising what existed before the era of the audit, this understanding might diminish the effort involved in creating whatever we (collectively) choose to name as 'real' education, or 'real' youth work. Authentic youth work does not emerge on its own in the absence of oppressive systems of measurement or farcical community meetings. It is not automatic; rather, it needs to be performed, created and struggled over in its own right.

Before going further I will pause here to think about whether the above is an appropriate use of theory, given that Butler and Sedgwick are writing about gender rather than workplace identity (see also McGimpsey, 2013 for further discussion on the use of feminist and queer theory in relation to youth work). Performativity in Butler and Sedgwick's usage draws on psychoanalytic theory which emphasises the disavowal, mourning and denial of same-sex love and desire from infancy, the splitting of desire and identification, and the shame that derives from being rejected or being different from what is seen as normal (Butler, 1997; Sedgwick, 2003; Layton, 2002). Humans in most societies are conditioned to experience gender identity as if it is natural, as if it is something we *are* rather than something we *perform.* Only a minority of us might feel that we *are* our workplace identity in a similar way, or that our work identity is natural, unquestionable and unchangeable. In language terms, gender just *is*, whereas work is explicitly referred to as a 'role', an 'act', something we *do*; this is borne out in the language of the workplace: 'taking on a new role', 'performing well' or 'acting manager'. Most people adopt different work identities throughout their life, and some do not feel that their job is part of their identity at all.

It seems clear that gender performativity is not directly applicable to understandings of work identities. And yet, even though workplace identities tend not to be seen as 'fixed' in the way that gender and sex often are, perhaps they are not so very different. When a child is born people tend to ask, 'Is it a girl or a boy?' To place an adult in a category it is customary to ask them about their work: 'What do you do?'[16] Some people feel they were born to do their job: perhaps they have known for as long as they can remember that they would follow in their family's footsteps, or have a strong sense of vocation and calling. Others start out uncertainly but come to feel that their work is something akin to a true expression of self. As discussed in the previous chapter, many of the participants in this research became youth workers by accident or chance and yet passionately claim 'youth worker' as a *core* aspect of their identity:

> I'm a community person, community worker, a youth worker, in my core. (Lorne)

[16] Gender is very much present in such discussions of work identity, of course. Men are more likely to be identified with their work, and are perhaps more often asked 'What do you do?' whereas women might more often be asked, 'Do you have children?' By reinterpreting ideas from gender performativity in another context, I do not mean to make gender less visible in this account.

> I'm not into labels because then it defines how you work with someone or how you treat someone [...] the only kind of definition I would say, 'Yep, that's me,' is a youth worker. (Sarah)

Feelings of work identity can ebb and flow, particularly in an age of flexibility and precarious employment, and it remains more socially acceptable in neoliberal and conservative times to have a fluid work identity than a fluid gender identity. Nevertheless, work *can* sometimes feel like an expression of genuine or authentic self: perhaps if we have been doing a job for a long time; if we find work particularly enjoyable or fulfilling; if it overlaps with or subsumes other parts of our lives; or if it feels particularly congruent with our values or beliefs. Many of these things are true for committed part-time and volunteer youth workers.

What does it mean to identify so strongly and passionately with a work role, particularly when this role is untaken part-time or on an unpaid basis, and particularly when it is as marginal and misunderstood as youth work? What does it mean if 'youth worker' feels like a core aspect of our identity and yet is being threatened from all angles? It is hardly surprising if we feel estranged or confused when we encounter clashes, inconsistencies and challenges within our work identities: as Judith Butler (2004, p.15) writes,

> I am always constituted by norms that are not of my making... norms work their way into what feels most properly to belong to me... I am other to myself precisely at the place where I expect to be myself.

For the youth workers in my study, it is most often audit and monitoring systems that were identified as playing a significant role in estranging the worker from their sense of self:

> It's not as much my organisation being able to say, 'yeah that's really good work and actually this is quality work', it's a numbers game, and we have to meet what the funders' expectations are. [...] I'm conflicted about it because I think whilst I always try and make sure my work is, um, young people have ownership of it and they have options and they choose things, sometimes that isn't the case. And I'm aware of that. (Mickie)

This is how authenticity becomes an arena of struggle; it becomes vitally important to assert a professional or personal identity that values honesty and rejects the false, the fake, the demeaning and the distracting. And yet, while youth workers in this research were keen to assert the genuine nature of their work, neither did they seem able to

escape dehumanising audit and measurement systems. Many of them have taken part in systems of measurement they see as damaging, false and demeaning, attempting to succeed according to such systems even as they have also spoken out against them. This strange paradox is something that I experienced long before I had heard of performativity. The clash becomes internalised; we are implicated in systems we disagree with and we are often unable to reconcile our beliefs and our actions. When I think about my own practice over the past decade or so in relation to targets I feel confused and conflicted, embarrassed and (at times) ashamed.

> In my last job there were a lot of targets. When I did not meet my targets I felt I had failed, that I was not good at my job. This is despite the fact that I opposed and hated them, and perhaps also *because* of this fact. And so, I nearly always managed to succeed, somehow. What was the cost? I am trying to remember and the picture blurs. I think there were many times I bribed young people with a trip or a pizza in return for filling in paperwork. I remember simplifying the recorded outcomes forms so they were quicker to fill out but became a tokenistic tick-box exercise. Once I accepted extra funding which came with so many targets that we ended up doing AQAs almost every week. I'm on my own as I'm writing this but I am cringing, screwing up my face, looking at the floor, shaking my head. I do not want to think about it.
>
> (Research diary, January 2014)

The shame is inescapable in performative systems, whichever way we turn. We feel shame when we do not meet our targets and are judged as failing. Then we also feel shame – perhaps of a slightly different nature - when we engage in practices that we know are antithetical to our work in order to meet our targets. The following is an excerpt from the discussion group that met three times during the course of this research to discuss questions its members devised and selected themselves. Here, they reflect on one of their chosen questions, 'Do we need to be driven by outcomes?'

> Mark: When I sit here and read that question I feel sick. Because I've done full sessions before that have been an hour, that I've had kids in a queue and I've gone, 'Right, outcome. Right. It was to cook. What did you think about it? Der, der. Sign there.' […] We were driven by the city council, they created these recorded outcomes, you had to have so many done within a certain month. But because I didn't like the system, because I just done youth work with the young people, there comes a point where your manager's like, 'I want your recorded outcomes' so you're like, 'Kids, work with me' […]
>
> Nicola: Yeah. But you're cheating the system cos you're thinking, 'This is a load of rubbish, I'm just gonna do it, I'm gonna make it look beautiful', and send it off. [...] But what are you teaching them?

Mark: I don't know! I don't know, that's why I said I feel sick! (Laughter) I'm not saying I'm right. […] I'm having one of them moments, I don't know why I done it! I should have just not done 'em, and just got sacked! (Laughter) No but honestly, the city council recording system was, oh (sighs), it was. You know. You used to get reports from the guy who used to collate the thing saying, 'Oh, you only contacted ten young people, why was that this month?' You know, questioning why you only contacted ten.

Arimas: The analyst.

Mark: The analyst, it analysed your data [...] If you went out and you'd been on a detached session and you didn't see anyone, 'How did you not see anyone on your detached session?' Cos it was throwing it down and it was the coldest night of the year. 'Oh no, that's not a real, you didn't really go out'. Well, I did!

We might feel a kind of pride or satisfaction in 'cheating the system' by meeting our targets in a perfunctory way, but our tactics offend against our sense of authenticity so we might also feel ashamed. Like Mark I feel sick when I think back on some of the compromises I have made. And yet we continue to meet our targets, perhaps to keep our jobs and to keep the funding coming, but also perhaps in a futile attempt to prove that we *are* authentic. Because it is not only youth workers who make claims on the real; the real is also the justification and the challenge of the audit. The system (represented in Mark's experience by a person who collates statistics and also by a computer 'analyst') suggests that *we are not real*: that we did not do the work, we did not go out, we were not there, our work did not take place - or that if it did, it was not good enough. Not 'being real' is a serious insult to a youth worker. We come apart when we do not meet the demands of the audit, and yet by meeting inappropriate targets we might fail to live up to our own ideas of how we should be.

Perhaps work identities are less violently policed than gender identities, but audit systems are strongly coercive. If we do not conform we are threatened on a personal level with disciplinary procedures, with losing our jobs, with having our projects shut down. In times of austerity the stakes are raised to the survival of our entire youth service or voluntary organisation; even of youth work itself. Refusal is not a heroic option - if we fail, we take everybody down with us. The passion we feel for our work is harnessed in a bid to save money and meet targets. We engage in systems we do not agree with to meet the requirements of the audit, and we might be embarrassed or ashamed of what we have had to do. This shame might be hidden or shared, perhaps

itself 'performed' in conversation with young people or with colleagues we can trust – even in a research diary or interview! The shame of *not* meeting targets, on the other hand, is made publicly visible through systems of 'naming and shaming':

> A big thing comes round to all the youth groups to tell you how the other youth centres are getting on. It's like a pecking order. So depending on how many accreditations they've had, all that kind of thing […] it puts you in order of who's had the most and who's had the least and it gets sent round to everybody. [...] So then those people get hoicked in the office individually and spoken to about the fact that they either need to get their numbers up or they need to start putting more information on there to be able to do it so they are monitoring it that way. (Louise)

Software systems play an important role in workplace surveillance and control (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012), and contribute to what Perryman (2006) refers to as panoptic performativity, where workers feel they are constantly observed. In this process of placing projects in a visible 'pecking order', youth workers become defendants and senior managers are positioned as arbiters and enforcers. Love and passion are repositioned, now imagined in relation to monitoring systems rather than direct work with young people:

> They were in love with this data monitoring […] These centre management meetings every Monday mornings and we went round the table and there's all the different projects in [borough] and all the managers sitting there. [...] The meetings were so dictatorial, authoritarian [...] Basically they went round and they checked with every manager, had they entered their data for this week? And everyone had to say sort of 'Yes' and you did feel like you were sitting in the headmaster's office at school while he was wielding a bloody cane or whatever. And I say 'he' deliberately. (Lorne)

Public shaming and comparisons create an atmosphere where non-conformity is almost unthinkable; not to fulfil your targets means letting the side down. Those who cannot adequately account for themselves are isolated and yet, somehow, their embarrassment flows outwards and everybody is implicated because 'shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating' (Sedgwick, 2003, p.36). Lorne's metaphor of the headmaster's office is apposite, as is his emphasis on 'he', implying the gendered nature of this kind of system that is reinforced by the structural gender imbalance between senior managers and practitioners. There is no room at large youth service meetings for reflection on practice; they have become a place where workers are called to account before returning to their neighbourhoods, chastened, with renewed pressure

to meet their targets.

Part-timers and volunteers are somewhat shielded from these processes; the downside is that they have little chance to defend, explain or object. In any case, shame seems to multiply and disseminate beyond the individuals who are seen as failing at any particular moment, attaching itself to their teams, the young people they work with, their colleagues, their organisation, and to youth work as a whole. Those who are seen as failing become marginalised, almost out of reach; just as youth work itself is marginal in relation to the school, the youth offending team, the family centre and the clinic. During a recent government inquiry into services for young people, youth work was accused of being unable to produce quantitative evidence of its effectiveness (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011a). National youth work umbrella groups rushed to support the development of the Young Foundation's new outcomes framework (McNeil, Reeder & Rich, 2012) rather than defending and asserting the necessarily unpredictable and highly contextual nature of youth work (Ord, 2014).

Writing in relation to gender, race and class identity, Layton (2002, p.202) argues that 'Non-dominant versions generally carry some shame – shame generated by looking at them through the lens of dominant positions'. Youth work is disproportionately organised for working-class, black and minority young people, and disproportionately staffed by working-class, black and minority workers, often women. Although its mainstream spaces are often dominated by young men, alternative spaces are claimed by women and girls, and by LGBT young people and workers (Spence, 2014; Batsleer, 2013b). What might this mean in terms of how youth work is seen through the lens of monitoring mechanisms that are designed according to middle-class habits and norms (Apple, 2006; 2013)?

Youth work is an ‘other’ in relation to more dominant forms of education and welfare (McGimpsey, 2013); stubbornly open-ended and indeterminate, it has always been difficult to grasp from the outside, and in the era of the audit becomes almost unintelligible. *Within* youth work the ‘other’ might be the part-timer and the volunteer - and the few full-timers who continue to spend most of their time with young people - working at their own pace, in the youth club or on the streets, where 'outcomes' might

be significant but are difficult to quantify or prove. In this context, workers can become ill, angry, depressed and isolated:

> I burnt out, I left, I was totally exhausted from the council, from not being supported enough, from not having the right staff, changes in the youth service at the time, the pressure being put on me to meet targets that I didn't even understand let alone had I or my colleagues or my young people set. So that was me being like, 'Uhhh, I'm absolutely ill,' basically. I felt ill. So I left. (Lorne)

> It gives me a stomach ache every single time I go to those meetings, every time I leave there I'm absolutely exhausted and low because I'm just so angry, I'm just so, I feel so alone [...] I just feel really disappointed. I'm like, how can they be a youth work organisation? (Laura)

Workers are operating in systems that seem to produce feelings of shame and exhaustion. Stress, pressure, illness, depression, anger and disappointment tell a sad and difficult story that counter-balances the love and passion discussed in the previous chapter. I want to keep this sadness and difficulty in mind while going on to think more hopefully about some ways in which the youth workers in this study engaged in performances that actively challenged cultures of targets and audit. In both its policy and gender versions, performativity is presented as a restrictive regime of power from which it is not possible to escape; and yet there is always a possibility of exercising agency, contestation and resistance (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Butler, 2004; 2006; 2013):

> If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. (Butler, 2004, p.3)

I do not intend to underestimate the difficulties and dilemmas involved in exercising agency in contexts where jobs are always under threat, nor suggest that there is a clear solution, but rather I will explore the possibilities and the actions that are already taken by grassroots youth workers to defend the authenticity of their work.

Counter-discourses and subversive performances

Even if youth workers cannot escape performativity by returning to an 'original' authentic identity, some are engaged in challenging the norms of managerialism and audit cultures through an emphasis on authenticity. Before considering some workers' overtly subversive performances, I want to start by thinking about everyday examples of contestation which are commonly performed as part of being a 'passionate youth worker'. When Forde was quoted early in this chapter she spoke about standards, figures, numbers and targets as both 'what we are' and 'what we do'; here, she explains how her own satisfaction depends on outcomes that are less tangible by those represented by the targets she is compelled to meet:

> To be honest the target thing, it doesn't really concern me. Because if I reach my target, I reach my target. If I don't reach my target, but I've managed to help young people through the way, and I *know* that they've made progress, that is my greatest thing. To know that that young person, I've met their needs, they've achieved something, they've come out of it well, they're doing something. That is how I feel. (Forde)

By emphasising the importance of the young person's experience and her interpretation of it, Forde places value on relational and informal processes that may be 'known' but are not always translatable into measurable outcomes. Her understanding challenges binary and linear forms of measurement that assume a young person with the right support will progress from unemployed to employed, from anxious to confident, or from unhappy to happy. By speaking disparagingly of 'box-ticking' and 'bums on seats', by valuing relationship, care and fun, youth workers like Forde are implicitly questioning the 'what' and 'how' of learning and evaluation.

Grassroots youth workers – particularly, I suspect, those who are working-class and (like Forde) black and female – have developed 'ways of knowing' that are based on care and human relationships (Hill Collins, 1990). I do not mean to suggest that all grassroots youth workers criticise targets and celebrate relationships, nor to imply that alternative 'ways of knowing' always constitute resistance. Nevertheless, when their work is formally judged according to statistical outcomes - and particularly in precarious employment and funding contexts – divergent performances, discourses and workplace cultures are important, brave and risky.

The values expressed to me as an interviewer and fellow grassroots youth worker (especially one who might be guessed or known to oppose target cultures) may not be as easily articulated in the workplace. Nevertheless, some workers make explicit interventions against performative cultures, exploring alternatives to the most inappropriate and damaging monitoring systems. Here, Laura reflects on a meeting with managers and trustees where she attempted to tell them about youth work in ways that went beyond what is easily communicable:

> I had to show what opportunities we give young people. I gave a few examples of concrete things we give them, very concrete tangible things. And then I said, 'But the most important things are the things you can't touch,' and I made a massive emphasis on that because they're so obsessed with bloody targets. So then I sort of made, from the concrete ones, which untangible ones come out of that. And then some comments from the young people (Laura)

Laura can be understood to be 'proceeding from a different field of judgement' (Lipman 2013, p.13), or drawing on alternative 'ways of knowing' (Hill Collins, 1990), countering targets with outcomes that are difficult or even impossible to capture: 'the things you can't touch'. She tells those senior to her that youth work is not easily captured in language let alone through numbers. Similarly, Alan talks about his attempts to communicate the benefits of open, loose and non-targeted youth work:

> People have become much better and more confident in defending the work we do here, because the work here is quite different to anywhere else really, because of the history of the youth club, the history of the estate, the style that we do, there's no targeted stuff at all, it's all completely open, and loose, and so now we're kind of trying to sell this idea of having a loose kind of relationship to the work, and to opening times, and to relationships with young people and *when* we do stuff and that kind of stuff, and now that's kind of becoming more and more actual like policy or like good practice, whereas before it was just seen as a negative thing. Because we couldn't communicate what we were doing. (Alan)

Communicating about youth work in ways that go beyond the quantitative and the specific can be seen as critically subversive because it unsettles the hegemonic practice of outcomes-focused work. In this vein, campaign group In Defence of Youth Work (2011) has developed story-telling methodologies that aim to record the effectiveness of youth work in all its complexity. Stories are gathered through workshops where workers share their youth work experiences and open them up for a process of collective critical questioning and reflection. In these workshops, the *process* of youth work is considered as important as its outcomes; perhaps a young person might not have found a job yet,

but their feelings about themselves right now (and their ability to make their way in the future) might have been radically changed through the youth work process. Workers are encouraged to think about their own role in the story, and how this relates (or does not relate) to the cornerstones of democratic and emancipatory youth work (In Defence of Youth Work, 2009; 2014). Young people, volunteers and external agencies can also be involved in the story-telling workshops, and some youth organisations have embedded story-telling practices in their evaluation processes. This is accountability to young people and the youth work field rather than to funders or government; a form of accountability that is collaborative rather than competitive.

Despite the development of counter-discourses and alternative evaluation methods, however, target cultures retain significant power in youth work. Workers might not 'feel' that targets are important, and might find ways to articulate the non-quantifiable and the non-linear benefits of youth work, but they remain subject to high-stakes measurement systems that they are required to comply with. Attempting to act outside and against a powerful norm does not make the norm disappear, and can sometimes even act to re-inscribe it (Butler, 1997). However, this should not be taken to mean that targets and outcomes are non-negotiable or that challenge is futile.

Several workers told me about avoiding or refusing targets that had initially been presented as compulsory, working with colleagues and young people to oppose aspects of managerial systems they felt were particularly damaging. This involved a tactical 'weighing up' of the relative gains and potential losses of compliance and refusal at different times; in other words, the choosing of battles. Laura, Lucy and Bridget refused to fulfil a target that required them to organise a certain number of sessions bringing young people together with the police, after young people objected to the idea (this story is discussed in more detail in the next chapter). The ability to refuse this target seemed to be contingent on a form of strategic performativity where they generally perform as 'good employees' in order to earn a relative degree of autonomy and the right to challenge aspects of their work they are particularly opposed to:

> We all work very hard. We don't have sickness. We don't have 'can't come into work' dramas. We don't cause any hassle as individual workers. […] If we say we're gonna do something we get it done. We respond to emails. So I think no matter how much they don't like us or we don't totally mesh with them, we're

> good as youth workers and we're actually quite easy, good employees. We don't have long bouts of sickness. We don't cause them any trouble, really. […] We never cancel sessions. We say we're doing a project, it happens. We do a trip, it happens. […] We give good reports. […] We don't give them any trouble. (Lucy)

This picture does not conform to the image of a maverick or rebellious youth work team; by acting as ‘quite easy, good employees’ these colleagues were able to challenge some of the grounds upon which they worked. Other workers had similar experiences – performing as 'good workers' helped them to negotiate or refuse particular elements of monitoring requirements. Alan worked long hours and went beyond the usual expectations of a part-time worker, which earned him relative autonomy over how he carried out his work. Louise's team engaged in specific projects to meet their targets in order to protect the core of their informal street-based work with small groups of young people that would not otherwise be seen as cost-effective or time-efficient. Many of the street-based workers agreed to carry out recorded and accredited outcomes as part of organised projects, with the proviso that they would not register young people’s names and addresses during their less formal work on the street. These practices of 'earning' the freedom to challenge or refuse the most damaging aspects of performativity echo wider policy discourse; for example, schools or colleges that are judged as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted earn greater autonomy in their teaching methods and curriculum (Keddie, 2013; Avis, 2005). It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of tactical, strategic or partial performativity, but such practices surely disrupt the assumed truth and necessity of standardised monitoring procedures.

Although workers commonly drew on support from colleagues and asked young people for their views, it was rare for young people and members of the wider community to be involved in direct campaigning against monitoring systems. A notable exception in my research was the LGBT project where Mickie worked, which engaged in successful collective opposition to their local authority’s monitoring database. Information on the database was visible to many people working for the local authority and funded voluntary organisations, who would then be able to see who was attending the LGBT project, effectively 'outing' them.

> It was brought to the young people and the young people made a campaign and we supported that and they wrote to the head of youth service […] We had

> parents come in and talk and stuff and public meetings and things, and supported the young people in their campaign to have their privacy respected. And um, it just turned out that it just remained the same. A big hoo ha over nothing. You know, and we were still, they were still getting the kind of statistical data, they just weren't getting the names […] I think it's about an ethos and a principle of respecting young people's details and not seeing their information as currency to get funding. (Mickie)

The success of this campaign related to the politicised ethos of the project, its workers, and members of the wider LGBT community who were drawn in to support the young people:

> I think the staff and volunteers are not threatened, are not gonna be pushed over [...] your threatening my job doesn't make my principles, or the principles of this place, any different, and things like that and, you know, the young people were supported into collectively sharing their voice with the people as well that were the decision makers so the people of influence really. So I think, I think it's partly just because of the kind of the general vibe of the place but also there was a lot of support from a lot of people who were kind of outraged by this kind of stuff and said 'no'. (Mickie)

In less politically aware settings, it is more challenging to move beyond individual action. Mickie's main job was in a mentoring project where database monitoring was taken-for-granted; there, she maintained her strongest principles (for example, refusing to record young people's sexual orientation) but had less room to oppose the nature of monitoring at a fundamental level. Collective action requires collective consciousness which, like youth work, must be performed, encouraged and nurtured. Like Mickie, Lorne worked in a (different) LGBT project where he refused to enter young people's details on the same grounds, that to record their attendance would involve 'outing' them. His effort was also successful but was somewhat isolated, perhaps because he was employed by a local authority rather than a politicised voluntary organisation and had less of a network of support. Looking back, Lorne felt that inexperience and stress prevented him from getting together with colleagues to oppose the monitoring system collectively:

> We all bitched and moaned all the time about what was happening but I don't think we ever thought strategically about protest or about what was going on for us, to be able to then have the perspective to say, 'Let's do this as a collective' [...] Even now I'd feel stressed in there but I think if it was a few years on and I could go in and actually see it for what it was, as opposed to coming up through it and not really knowing what I was involved in. (Lorne)

For some workers, setting up their own organisations seemed to be a way of regaining control over their work and making decisions over the forms of monitoring they were involved in. My experience as part of Voice of Youth suggests that working outside of oppressive monitoring systems is possible if it goes alongside a willingness to negotiate, support each other, and turn down funding where necessary (see Chapter 7). I recognise Mickie's point that struggles with funders can feel at the time like 'a big hoo ha over nothing'. However, if they are collective and involve young people, colleagues and the wider community, they are more than this - they provide a challenge to the assumed necessity and normality of measuring outcomes according to prescriptive criteria. They also show young people that their views are important and their action can be effective. Negotiations and campaigns can take the struggle over performativity beyond the worker's individual experiences of the clash between the work they believe in and targets they do not, into a more public realm.

Conclusion: Breaking the rules?

Paperwork (2)

'Where are they?' asks Shay indignantly, looking up and down the street. 'They're usually here on Fridays!' Jenna shrugs and sends a text to find out. They wander into the corner shop and eye up the vodka. Soon, Jenna's phone beeps. 'Huh! Jo says they have too much paperwork to do, they'll see us next week.' Shay sighs, 'Paperwork, again!'...

It's the last day of the quarter, and the youth workers have a system. Jo is checking the forms are filled out properly and Ricky is battling the photocopier. They moan, grumble and worry their way through the task, bored and strangely satisfied as they create neat piles of paper, stapled and labelled with coloured post-its. This time they'll miss their target for accreditations (that unpopular drugs debate session was a waste of effort) but maybe they can catch up by the end of the year. Or maybe, suggests Jo, they should go to their manager again

and explain that accreditation isn't working with their current groups. 'No point, it's a waste of time arguing,' says Ricky...

A few minutes bike ride away, a group of young men are sitting on their usual wall. Danny surreptitiously checks that nobody's mum is about, and passes a spliff to Sadiq. 'Your youth workers are shit,' says Sadiq, 'It's like school, always forms to fill in. Boring! We never do anything fun any more.' 'Yeah,' agrees Danny, adding, 'I dunno. It's not their fault though. They're alright.'

This research adds modestly to the weight of evidence against the taken-for-granted use of inappropriate quantitative audit mechanisms in and beyond youth work. The experiences and emotions expressed by grassroots youth workers in relation to monitoring and target cultures will be recognisable in settings outside youth work - they are likely to be familiar to workers throughout education and the wider public and community sectors. There are also ways in which this analysis is particular to youth work - the things that make youth work special (its informality and responsiveness) make it *particularly* unsuited to pre-planned outcomes and competitive monitoring technologies (Ord, 2014; Fusco, 2013; Taylor & Taylor, 2013; Tiffany, 2011). For youth workers, targets can be distracting and demoralising; for young people they can be tedious and demeaning.

Over the past decade, target and audit cultures have become a dominant and normalised feature of youth work, not only for managers but also for workers at the grassroots. Throughout this research, workers consistently emphasised how targets, outcomes and paperwork clashed with what they saw as *real* youth work. Performativity evokes struggles over identity and authenticity; over what it is to have genuine and honest relationships with young people and with colleagues. It is hardly surprising, perhaps, that debates over what is 'real' are prominent in contexts where youth work must be recorded on a database if it is seen to exist at all. If the database does not recognise some of the work they were doing, does not even recognise all of the young people they are working with, some youth workers come to the conclusion that good practice means breaking the rules:

Lucy:	You find ways around it. [...]
Laura:	So basically to be a good youth worker we need to break the rules.
Bridget:	Yeah.
Lucy:	We need to be creative with the way you meet your targets.

Workers go the extra mile to think of less demeaning, less shameful ways to meet targets. They spend time and energy being 'creative', or explaining the unpredictability of youth work to their managers and funders. A few refuse to obey, even refuse to aim for 'excellence' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Some act collectively with colleagues, young people and the community to challenge taken-for-granted monitoring procedures. Overt forms of challenge may be rare, and arguing or breaking the rules feels stressful and risky. Where it occurs, though, dissent questions the normalisation of targets and keeps the debate alive. Workers' attempts to understand and do things differently constitute meaningful political action. This does not necessarily mean they are able to escape target cultures, and in many cases the structures that embed the targets seem to survive any form of challenge. However, this does not mean that subversion and challenge are futile, as they may change the world in ways that are difficult to predict:

> It's as if one says, 'You think that's subversion, and you think that's criticism? Actually, it's nothing other than an extension of an existing power regime - end of story.' Now, what I want to be able to say is, 'Sure, we are extending the contemporary power regime by our ostensible subversion, but there's extending the power regime and there's extending the power regime.' Extending it does not mean extending it always in the same form; it could mean reiterating it in new forms. Extending is not a mechanical process. We need to understand power as something that produces unanticipated effects, that we can certainly extend power but that we can extend it into an unknown future. (Butler in Olson & Worsham, 2000, p.740).

Targets, outcomes, databases and bureaucratic requirements herald disillusion, frustration, anger and even illness amongst grassroots youth workers; they also lead to creativity and rebellion. In a context of cuts and precarity, straightforward refusals to engage in these systems do not often feel like a viable option. There were numerous signs of contestation, from widespread counter-discourses to local negotiations and attempts to build more collective forms of resistance, but for most youth workers, most of the time, it is barely possible to avoid or resist targets or outcome based monitoring. The resulting heavy administrative workloads and feelings of inauthenticity can drive youth workers away from what they are good at, while monitoring systems tend to

distort the work that takes place. They also create an insidious culture of distrust and pathologisation, where young people are tracked by surveillant technology with which youth workers - however unwillingly – collude. It is this focus on surveillance and how it positions young people in relation to youth workers that I will explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 6
Watching the young people? Detached youth work, surveillance and re-imagining the street

Something to hide? (1)

Squeezed in with the buggies on the bus, Jenna leans on the window and writes in large loopy letters in the back of her French exercise book: 'I HATE TEACHERS. Pretending to be friendly LIKE THEY CARE and then they go and SNITCH to social services. SNAKES!!!' She feels someone reading over her shoulder, turns around quickly with her eyes screwed up small and mean, ready for anything, but nobody is looking. She rips out the page and tears it into tiny shreds, crumples the pieces in her hand, drops them on the floor and jumps off at the next stop. Hopefully Shay will have some money and they can get vodka. She sees Jo across the road – probably walking to the office - and they both smile and wave, shouting, 'Hiya!' and 'Laters!' Jo and Ricky are meeting up with them this evening to organise a trip to Alton Towers. Jenna's never been. It's going to be amazing. Ricky's safe, he's really funny. Jo's nice and she's kind, even though she won't give them cigs (and Jenna knows for a fact that Jo smokes!)

The siren gets louder, and Danny pulls his hood up. Then sucks his teeth, wondering why he's acting as if he's got something to hide. Like at school where he was always the one pulled out of line, even when he'd not been doing anything wrong. It was like a prison there. 'Line up, no touching, stand against the wall, hands where we can see them.' Cameras everywhere but it's not the ones you can see that you need to worry about, it's the ones they've hidden and the secret microphones in the walls. The bully van passes slowly, siren off now but lights still flashing. He expects them to get out and stop him: 'We are looking for someone of your description' - yeah, black boy in a hoody. Surprise, surprise. 'You're detained for the purposes of a search, let's get this over with mate, arms up, anything sharp in your pockets?' Blah blah bullshit. But the van drives on into the estate. He messages his mates to warn them, just in case, and then sees Jo walking his way. He looks away but it's too late, she smiles at him, so Danny has to mumble 'Alright', then he looks away because he's not in the mood for talking.

She just says 'Hi' and keeps walking. She's ok. Hopefully she'll be out with Ricky later. Ricky's jokes.

At home, at school and on the streets, young people are habituated to networks of surveillance that are designed to watch, control, judge and protect. As Introna (2003, p.212) argues, 'Surveillance is not just a general "staring" at the world; it is always with a purpose, i.e. to make some judgement about the one being monitored'. Surveillance produces data that justifies its own expansion, becoming a cause as well as an effect of information gathering and social monitoring (Hier, 2003).

In this chapter I explore the role played by street-based youth workers in the surveillance of young people as well as their opposition to this surveillance, drawing on a sub-sample of interview material from the fourteen research participants who were engaged in detached youth work. Detached work is a specific form of practice in which workers meet young people who spend time in public spaces, aiming to build relationships with these young people on their own terms rather than coming to them with a specific project or aim in mind (Tiffany, 2007; FDYW, 2007; Whelan, 2010). I am particularly interested in these workers in relation to understandings of surveillance because they often work on the streets while being far enough away from office bases that they have relatively high levels of autonomy in comparison to workers in youth centres. At times, detached youth work has had a romantic reputation, as if it is a space where maverick youth workers and marginalised young people can stay out of sight of the everyday surveillance mechanisms that govern most public and voluntary sector work. My contention is that detached work is no longer able to sustain such claims of distance and independence – at least, not without considerable levels of conscious refusal and avoidance. In this chapter I want to think about where this leaves grassroots street-based workers who want to build relationships with young people *on their own terms* and *on their own territory.*

There is a well-established tension between youth work for social control and youth work for social change, and this tension can be particularly pertinent to detached workers. Many of the detached workers in this research are uncomfortable with – if not opposed to – some of the things they have been asked to do. They are particularly

critical of projects that bring them into the realm of the 'establishment' in their own or young people's eyes, such as requirements to work alongside the police, and of systems that require them to gather information on young people they meet on the street. They rarely use the word surveillance; however, I find it a useful concept in understanding youth workers' street-level dilemmas, particularly around who they work with and how they pass on information. The wider context to these dilemmas was discussed in the previous chapter – it is not only young people who are being watched, it is also the workers themselves. In fact, it is not always clear which group is the primary target, or whether in fact surveillance is a primary or incidental goal of information sharing systems.

Bronwyn Davies (2005) writes about surveillance in the context of higher education, but her point about its necessary role in sustaining the neoliberal cult of individual responsibility applies to education workers in many fields:

> Surveillance becomes a key element of neoliberal systems, necessitated by the heightened emphasis on the individual's responsibility and the de-emphasising of inner values and commitment to the social good. Trust is no longer realistic or relevant. Each person no longer trusts the other to work properly, and each becomes one of the multiple eyes spying on each other. Further, reporting mechanisms for monitoring and producing appropriate behaviour are mandated. These mechanisms are, in turn, very costly and devour an enormous proportion of shrinking funds, thus requiring an increase in the amount of work each worker is expected to do. (p.10)

Surveillance, like the performativity discussed in the previous chapter, is not only something that is ‘done to’ or ‘done by’ education workers; it is also something that we do to ourselves. This analysis draws on Foucault's theories of self-government in which he employs the metaphor of the panopticon, an eighteenth century design for a circular prison with a central viewing tower (Bentham, 1995; Foucault, 1977). In a panopticon, prisoners are situated in individual cells around the periphery and can be monitored by the guards at any time, but they cannot see into the viewing tower and therefore do not know when they are being watched. In Foucault's view, this is a metaphor for how modern societies are governed: pervasive surveillance means that we do not know when we are being watched, and we act to regulate our own behaviour according to what is and is not acceptable or allowable. In this understanding, surveillance systems are not primarily deployed to ‘catch’ those who break the rules; more importantly, they are a disciplinary mechanism to encourage certain modes of behaviour and discourage others

amongst the wider populace. This had clearly been felt by young people interviewed for a piece of Australian research into young people's views on surveillance:

> Me and my mates we're always getting some look from the security guard, or you know, security cameras. We're not trying to be bad, we're not starting any trouble, we're not doing anything wrong. But it's the mentality. (Young person quoted in Wilson, Rose & Colvin, 2010)

These young people know that they are categorised as potential trouble-makers. Even if they have done nothing wrong, they are treated as troublesome because of how they look (and this will be affected by their perceived age, class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender). The security guard feels that he or she is preventing crime or nuisance by watching them and there might well be substantial public support for the removal or policing of young people 'hanging around', but this cannot be understood separately from the wider demonisation of young people in general and working-class, black and Muslim young people in particular. Those groups who are already disadvantaged are most likely to be the target of surveillance and this weakens notions of a public sphere where everybody feels included and respected. Marxist theorists have pointed out that urban surveillance operates against marginalised groups in the interests of capital, and rarely targets serious corporate or environmental crime (Coleman et al., 2005). Profit becomes the justification for the targeting of young people on the streets, as was also borne out by the same Australian research:

> Just want us away from their areas because apparently we make their business look bad or whatever like. But that's not the case; it's just that we don't have our own place to f**king chill. (Young person quoted in Wilson, Rose & Colvin, 2010)

Like homeless people and elderly pensioners, groups of teenagers are seen as having limited economic value; these groups are designated as undesirable in the entrepreneurial city, so that 'it is often merely their visibility alone and not their behaviour that is deemed problematic' (Coleman, 2005, p.141). In the new urban landscape, shiny privatised malls and gated residential areas create an illusion of security and pleasure for those who can afford to live there; there is no space here for young people to 'hang out', so they are 'designed out' through heightened surveillance and security measures, the removal of benches and the privatisation of previously public space. New urban spaces become 'visualised spectacles that promote ways of seeing urban space as benign, "people-centred" and celebratory' (Coleman 2005, p.132), and

black and ethnic minority communities are often displaced (Lipman, 2011; 2013). This is illustrated, for example, by artists' impressions of a redesigned shopping area in a gentrifying area of East London, which:

> …revealed Hackney's transformation into a borough inhabited almost entirely by young white people. The diversity of the borough has almost completely disappeared and the different communities, cultures and people of all ages and abilities have been replaced with white children and cyclists.[17]

Towards the end of this chapter I will discuss how youth workers and young people might re-imagine the street quite differently - not as a money-making arena for the privileged, but as a diverse and contested space to be claimed and shaped by those who inhabit it. First, the main body of the chapter focuses on detached youth workers' responses to policy which requires their involvement in the surveillance of young people who spend time on the streets. Drawing on stories of collusion and resistance told by detached workers involved in my research, I will begin by looking at how these practitioners make claims of distance from systems of control. I will then explore how policy has drawn these same workers into surveillance roles, taking as examples joint work with the police, and the sharing of young people's details on electronic databases. I will conclude with a discussion of how youth workers might work with young people and others to build critical understandings of surveillance and to re-imagine the street as a space where young people are seen in a positive light, where they are welcome to spend time and participate fully in community life.

Youth work on the streets

Detached youth workers build relationships with young people in places where they spend time such as street corners, bus stops, squares, shopping centres, cafés and amusement arcades. The approach was originally developed in the 1950s with the aim of reaching young people seen as disengaged from mainstream services. From its beginnings it was intended to be different from other forms of work with young people, 'detached' from institutions that young people identified as hostile or irrelevant (Goetschius and Tash, 1967; Morse, 1965). Initially an experimental practice, detached youth work has become well established over the decades; it has formed its own

[17] Ngoma Bishop from Black and Ethnic Minority Arts (BEMA), quoted in Loeb (2013).

independent organisation, the Federation for Detached Youth Work, and built a coherent body of literature (see, for example, Morse, 1965; Goetschius & Tash 1967; Cox, 1970; Blandy, 1971; Wild, 1982; Dadzie, 1995; Kaufman, 2001; Crimmens et al., 2004; Burgess & Burgess, 2006; FDYW, 2007; Tiffany, 2007; Whelan, 2010). The detached workers in my study present a relatively coherent view of their work, which they saw as qualitatively different to other types of youth work, and which they distinguished from other agencies that worked on the streets. Here, Rachel talks about starting out as a part-time detached worker in her southern town:

> At the time in [town] there were a lot of agencies working with young people in their own settings but most of them were there to move young people on or to stop the behaviour that they were exhibiting whereas obviously we were coming at it from an entirely different point of view. So the young people perhaps would be more wary of us than I expected […] They thought we were wardens a lot of the time, community wardens or like plain clothes police [...] As soon as we explained what we were doing they were absolutely fine, it was just that initial 'Don't walk away, please don't walk away!' you know. 'This is what we're here for, we're here to kind of work with you, not against you, not to move you on'. […] We were there to advocate with them, work with them where they were, not expect them to go to a youth club, not to expect them go home or move on [...] we came from it from such a different perspective than other agencies.

It is interesting that Rachel talks here about what detached work *is not* and what detached workers *do not do*: they are not wardens or plain clothes police, are not stopping young people's behaviour, and are not moving them on or telling them to go home or to a youth club. As Rachel says, 'we're here to kind of work with you, not against you'. Her emphasis on what detached work is 'not' seems to challenge societal assumptions about what a professional is likely to be doing with young people on the streets – particularly the assumption that young people should be moved *off* the streets. The 'get them off the streets' view is so entrenched that when I am writing funding bids with young people, they often suggest including this phrase (perhaps saying what they think adults, or at least funders, want to hear). In contrast, Rachel and other detached workers view it as normal for young people to spend time on the streets:

> It is their own time, and they have chosen to meet their friends and they don't necessarily want adults involved or any organised activity. […] I can totally understand why they would want to meet outside away from people and not be hassled, you know, and even if it is to kind of drink and smoke, to go through the normal rites of passage, you know, meeting people, I can totally understand why they want to do that.

Although many detached youth workers maintain a positive view of young people on the streets, this is in contrast to the context under which they are most often funded and employed: the widespread public and political concerns over young people's presence on the streets. This ‘moral panic’ is echoed in everyday language, where the street is a metaphor for trouble. If someone is 'on the streets' they might be taken to be homeless; if 'working the streets' they are assumed to be sex workers. In urban slang, if someone is 'on road' it implies they are involved in gangs. Young people who spend time on the streets with their friends are spoken of as 'youths', 'vandals', 'sluts', 'hoodies', 'drug dealers' or 'binge drinkers'; whatever they are *actually* doing they are said to be 'hanging around', 'up to no good'. The detached workers I interviewed were generally critical of these stereotypes, but within this critique there was a spectrum of attitudes that perhaps reflects differing organisational and professional cultures as well as individual perspectives. In contrast with Rachel's account, here is a passage from my interview with Olly, a centre-based, outreach and detached worker who works in a different Southern town and its rural environs:

> What we tend to base the detached work on, again it would tend to be perceived problems around town […] they'll tend to have their picnics and get up and go and they'll just leave a ring of litter, and it really upsets the residents. [...] People hanging out late at night in places that are sort of dry and a little bit lit, and we've got bus shelters, um, outside of supermarkets, um, kids' playgrounds, and you know, there's questions of alcohol, and cannabis use. Um. That really upsets the public and is a perceived problem. Um. Older lads hanging around places like the skate park in the old days, um, and seeing that just as a good place to, you know, polish off a few bottles of beer and suchlike, and then you might get smashed glass. That sort of thing. So we're told of these sort of problems and we'll go out and just explain to people sort of, um, look, you know, this is the perceived problem, this is why we're on the streets, what's their take on it?

In this passage, Olly draws on a discourse that identifies young people on the street as problematic, positioning detached youth work as a response. Here 'the residents' and 'the public' are set against young people who are associated with 'problems' including litter, hanging out late at night, alcohol, cannabis, smashed glass and upsetting people. However, Olly himself does not seem comfortable with this discourse, speaking hesitantly and going some way to challenging it. Of the four times he uses the word 'problem' here, three times he precedes it with 'perceived'. He avoids using negative labels for the young people, calling them 'people' and 'lads', and although he approaches

them on the basis of an externally identified problem he asks them for 'their take on it'. Detached workers have for many years been under growing pressure to tackle 'hotspots' of youth crime or anti-social behaviour, and the differing accounts of Rachel and Olly echo the divergent perspectives of detached youth workers in other research (Tiffany, 2007; Crimmens et al, 2004). What both Rachel and Olly have in common is an emphasis on building relationships and taking young people's views seriously.

> For me, detached work is about building relations, just talking to young people, finding out where they're at, what's pissing them off, what they enjoy, but letting them know that actually you're, you're not the police, you're not an authority so to speak, but you can work with those people and hopefully have some stuff going in. We always take sort of suggestions back with us. (Olly)

Of all the workers I interviewed, Olly was probably the most positive about working with the police; however, he still clearly differentiates himself from them, telling young people he's 'not the police... not an authority'. It was common amongst the detached workers in my research to speak about this form of work as 'different' - more community based, more free, more flexible, and less target orientated:

> On detached you've got more freedom, I feel, you can go out and do more with the community. (John)

> Things can come out of detached work but you're not advertising something [...] And I think it's the only space in youth work where I think they can lead and it's not too target focused. (Lucy)

> When you're on the streets you're like, you're not in that position of power. (Tracey)

This latter point from Tracey is interesting in relation to control and surveillance. It is not that detached workers have no power: they have structural power as adults and workers, and through their relationships with young people they often have access to personal information that could be used or misused. The entire premise of detached work could be interpreted as a form of surveillance, as another way of acquiring information about someone. Whether and how youth workers' power is exercised is vitally relevant to how their relationships with young people can be understood. By treating the streets as young people's space and respecting their time and what they want to talk about, detached youth workers are often in a more equitable power dynamic with young people than is possible for most professionals:

> Literally you're just approaching a group of young people on the streets, in their own environment, in their own social space, in their own social time. (Quincie)

> You're on their turf at that time, and it's not that it's hostile, it's just that if actually they want to get on with what they're doing at that time and without you, that's something to respect […] you start getting into a conversation and then they suddenly feel it's uncomfortable and they don't want to go any further, that's the end of that. (Olly)

One of the ways in which detached workers show their respect for young people is to take time to build relationships on their terms, often slowly and painstakingly:

> If we move to a new area we always start our work through reconnaissance and slowly develop reconnaissance through the area, through the community members, through where young people hang around, through the parks and everything and open spaces and slowly build that, and if we see young people slowly build that relationship, say hi and bye and that sort of thing, greet members of the community and just slowly, slowly do that. [...] that sort of open approach and taking it easy. (Mahad)

> You slowly get to know them on the street. You slowly start seeing them to begin with. You hardly say hello because that's intrusive, unless they want to. They start seeing your face. Then eventually you start saying hello, you start chatting for a bit, randomly about anything. They start seeing, ok this person's around here. All of a sudden you start having really deep conversations about something really important to them. And this all just from slowly seeing them around there, on their terms, you know? (Laura)

These workers emphasise being friendly and open, taking it easy, avoiding intrusive questions, chatting, sticking around. It is notable that the word 'slowly' appears eight times in these two short passages from Mahad and Laura, showing a respect for the pace of real human relations that do not always fit in with external targets and time pressures (Colley et al, 2012). Because of its working methods, the time it takes, and its spatial positioning away from the office, detached work has historically been less monitored than other forms of youth work:

> We have a freer rein than youth centres do […] The management and that don't really tend to come and see what we're up to or make sure we're in or whatever. Whereas at youth centres I know they often, when you arrive at the youth centre there might be a manager there to see if you've arrived on time [...] They have been checking up on a lot of people but they haven't been checking up on us as far as I'm aware, not yet anyway. (Laughs) So yeah I think we do have more of a free rein than the others, they do seem to get monitored a lot, and those evaluation sheets do get checked whereas I'm not entirely sure that ours do. (Louise)

None of this is to suggest that detached youth work is a panacea. Although well-intentioned, it may rarely be as free, open and equal as its practitioners claim (Siurala, 2014). It can be over-romanticised and has even been accused of being 'a fetish of professional virility' (France & Wiles, 1997, p.74). Detached work has not been immune to the changes affecting youth work over the past decades: the spending cuts, marketisation and target cultures that are discussed throughout this thesis. It has also been vulnerable to requirements to take part in the formal surveillance of young people on the streets through joint work with the police and the use of electronic database tracking systems. These requirements have been introduced, variously, through national and local government strategies, funding priorities and the actions of managers and practitioners on the ground. As policy is decentralised and dispersed, it is formed through networks of governmental, private and charitable organisations (Ball, 2012) and enacted at the level of practice (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). At times decentralisation enables flexibility and negotiation at a local level for practitioners as well as policy makers, and we will see that grassroots youth workers have sometimes been successful in challenging local manifestations of policy. On the other hand, decentralised processes tend to mystify and obscure the ideological forces that lie behind policy developments which are played out differently in each local context, and this can make collective resistance more difficult.

As in other chapters, my analysis here relies on an understanding of policy as a process of struggle and contestation rather than as straightforward problem-solving (Ozga, 2000; Ball, 2008a). Practitioners do not simply implement policy; they change, develop, avoid and contest it, as well as being influenced and shaped by it (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). In this context it is useful to look at the experiences of a small number of part-time and volunteer detached youth workers from different organisations, both local authority and voluntary sector, and in different local authority areas in England. In what follows, I will look at workers' experiences of policy - first in relation to working with the police, and then in relation to electronic tracking and surveillance – in terms of how they are affected, how they collude and how they resist.

Working - and not working - with the police

> A lot of young people don't trust us any more. A lot of young people don't trust youth workers because they expect us to work with the police, or I don't know what. Or they just don't trust adults because they've been messed about by adults. (Laura)

In the 1980s and 1990s, several local authorities and youth organisations, particularly those in urban areas, prohibited police officers from working as volunteer or paid youth workers. It was part of my initial training that I should never allow police officers into a youth club without a warrant. This stance was formed in the context of widespread police harassment of black, ethnic minority, working-class and subcultural groups of young people, particularly in the wake of the riots in the early 1980s. While substantial changes have taken place, these groups of young people still experience unfair treatment by the police, whose institutional racism was confirmed in 1999 by the MacPherson Report on the inquiry into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Today's police force is more aware of the need at least to appear to uphold equality, although this position is belied by the disproportionately high rates of stop and search of black young men (Bowling & Phillips, 2007; EHRC, 2010). Today, some youth workers and organisations continue to emphasise the importance of a separation from the police (Amara, 2013). At the same time there have long been youth workers and organisations who are prepared or even keen to work informally with the police, whether to pass on information or to improve relations between these groups (John, 1981; Hackney CVS, undated).

While informal arrangements are nothing new, policy in recent years has led to an increase in *formal* arrangements between youth services and the police. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 had a significant role in this change by requiring public bodies to publish crime and disorder strategies, as well as introducing a raft of legislation aimed at youth crime; this included anti-social behaviour orders, child curfews and the removal of truants off the streets to their homes or to ‘designated premises’. In this context, detached workers in many areas were brought into closer partnerships with the police through schemes such as Operation Stay Safe, where police officers worked with other agencies to remove young people from the streets at night and take them to a 'place of safety' (Home Office, 2009). Some detached workers objected that joint work would exploit their relationships with young people and co-opt youth work into policing

and surveillance roles, whereas others felt that joint projects enabled them to improve relationships between police and young people:

> It's good to build bridges between people they might not necessarily associate with, certainly on the police side. And actually see underneath the uniform they're real people. And it's also I think quite good for the police to see, you know, these kids have got some sort of potential and just because they spend an awful lot of time in the sort of bus stops and such like, doesn't mean they're actually bad people. Just not got much direction. (Olly)

When I mentioned to Olly that some youth workers object to working with the police, he emphasised that he always asks young people for their views and would not bring the police to a session without young people's agreement. He finds it satisfying and rewarding to bring police and young people together, arguing that it makes a difference to attitudes on both sides. John, a younger and newer detached and centre-based worker, spoke with similar optimism about police-related meetings he attended for his youth service employer:

> On detached I've done a lot more with communities, and I've been involved with PACT [Partners and Communities Together] meetings […] it's open to everybody just to come along, and talk about any issues that are sort of within their community and you also get the police come along as well. So, the young people [...] get to know the police well in a positive way within these meetings […] With [county] police there's the [...] Independent Advisory Group. It's a group that's set outside of the police, it's independent, um, and they advise the police on how to do their job. […] everybody's involved, the youth service, the police, social services, churches, er, young people, politicians, the whole sort of shebang, just all sort of group together and sort of, 'Well, what shall we talk about?' You know, 'What's going on and what can we do to improve?'

John enjoys the opportunity these meetings give him for involvement with the community and different agencies. Like Olly, he has positive reasons for wanting to work with the police and finds that this work brings certain satisfactions. However, working with the police could be seen as a form of 'new authoritarianism':

> The sleight of hand by which profoundly reactionary policies are often clothed in radical or progressive rhetoric has enabled anti-democratic practice and a controlling ideology to become embedded in the discourse of youth policy and practice. (Jeffs and Smith, 1994, p29).

Police involvement in community meetings and football games can be seen as a means of intelligence gathering and legitimisation, examples of Foucault's governmentality:

'the deliberations, strategies, tactics and devices employed by authorities for making up and acting upon a population and its constituents to ensure good and avert ill' (Rose, 1996, p.328). There *are* real people underneath the uniform, as Olly says, but it is important to recognise that the uniform is meaningful: it stands for an institution that exerts and misuses its structural power in relation to young people (Bowling & Phillips, 2007; EHRC, 2010; Lepper, 2013a; 2013b; MacPherson, 1999; MPA, 2008). For this reason, some youth workers in my study refused to work with the police despite policy requirements to do so. These are stories of overt rebellion that constitute more straightforward examples of refusal than much of the 'everyday resistance' seen thus far in this study. Here I will look at two examples.

'You do not control us' (Tracey's story)

Tracey is the part-time coordinator of a small Christian youth charity that had received local authority funding for some years, with slightly different stipulations each year. As part of the most recent year's contract, Tracey had been required to work with the police on Friday and Saturday nights, confiscating alcohol from groups of young people and encouraging them to 'move on'. This was a sudden change in direction that, she felt, seemed to undermine the independence and experience of her organisation:

> It was like, 'we're doing this, we fund you, you need to do it like this.' And of course immediately your back gets up. Cos you're like, 'Well, no actually, I'm not so sure as I want to walk around with the police. Because I'm not so sure this is gonna help our relationships with young people and how they see us.'

Tracey's misgivings were grounded in a local knowledge of young people built up over many years, rather than a principled opposition to working with the police per se. She was aware that some young people would not be comfortable with her working with the police and therefore felt that it was important to keep the roles separate:

> They're gonna get so confused. Especially the police bit, because we've not worked with the police before, and whilst we've got relationships with the community support officers that are amazing and really lovely in [town], most of them anyway [...] now all of a sudden the police are *with* us.

Tracey started working with the police, albeit reluctantly. She did not like confiscating alcohol or telling young people to go home, which she felt was not a youth worker's role. In addition, she found it problematic working with different colleagues every week

and felt that her own experience was not respected. Weighing all of this up, she decided with her manager (the chairman of trustees of the charity) that they could not continue with the project as it went against the ethos of their organisation. They attempted to negotiate with the local authority, but to no avail:

> We stuck to our guns and they said 'Well if you don't do it like this then we won't fund you, you will lose your contracts with us and we won't pay you'. […] And it was brilliant because my chairman was like, 'Well actually, what you're saying to us is you own the purse strings. Well actually, this type of work doesn't fit in with what we think our remit is, our mission statement. And we won't do it.' So that was amazing.

Her organisation's refusal to continue the project lost them their entire local authority funding, around four thousand pounds a year. This was a significant sum for this small organisation, and pulling out was a big decision:

> I got so upset over it, I was coming back from the meetings in tears and I was thinking, this is not... this is absolutely not worth it [...] the lead, this particular woman one day said to me 'Well you need to do this and you need to do that'. And I was like, 'You do not control us'. And I think from that viewpoint she decided she didn't, she couldn't work with me any more. No, it was really horrible actually.

Tracey's organisation plugged the funding gap and finished in a position of strength, but not without considerable upset. The same themes of stress and struggle are echoed in the following story from another group of workers in a different area of the country.

'We were very honest with the young people' (Bridget, Lucy and Laura's story)

Bridget, Lucy and Laura worked together for a medium sized voluntary sector organisation in a London borough. Throughout their small group interview they were enthusiastic about their work with young people but critical of many of the things they were asked to do, particularly in relation to a detached project funded by the local authority on the basis of crime prevention. The contract included a target for working with young people at risk of crime, and another target for organising a certain number of joint events with the police. Although this funding enabled them to maintain relationships with a particular group of young people, they were deeply unhappy about its conditions:

> I think one of the targets that kind of got me was, 'Can you identify how many

> young people were at risk of crime?' […] that horrified me, it absolutely horrified me. Cos I thought, number one, I'm not going to go up to the young people and say, 'Right, what category do you think you fit then? Crime?' […] I ran a mile from it. I ran a mile. I actually went to my manager and said 'Hell no, I don't want to do that project no more, take me off'. (Bridget)

Bridget decided that she would no longer take part in this project, despite (or perhaps because of) being a self-employed youth worker on an insecure contract. Lucy and Laura, both of whom had permanent part-time contracts, continued working on the project despite their doubts, and yet at the beginning they met the young people they knew in the area to discuss their dilemmas around the targets:

> We were very honest with the young people at the beginning of the project and said 'You know, we do have these targets, but we also consider your views on the targets very important, and if you say downright no we won't go with it'. And we said to young people, 'Look, we do have a target where police would come to the project'. And they said no. [...] They wouldn't move on that at all. And that's fine and we really respected that. [...] So in the end we didn't do it. And we just said to our managers there's no way we can do that and expect young people to come to the project. [...] We said we couldn't do it and spoke to the funders and said that this target is never going to happen. (Lucy)

As a result of talking to the young people, the workers refused to work with the police despite this having been a requirement of funding. They used the pragmatic argument that young people would not come to the project if the police were involved. Their resistance on this point was successful, and they retained their funding contract although they remained unhappy about its ethos which required them to categorise young people on the streets as being at risk of involvement in crime. The following excerpt from their discussion illustrates their continuing mixed feelings:

> Laura: I have to give us a bit of a pat on the shoulder though. Because I think we as workers did find some kind of good, we were really stressed out about it, but we did do a really good balance all the time.
> Lucy: Yeah.
> Tania: Yeah.
> Laura: We sat the young people down, number one. We didn't do the horrible things, we didn't actually brand them as 'at risk', anyone.
> Lucy: And we were honest with them as well, I think, from the beginning.
> Laura: Yeah we were honest with the young people, we didn't do the police visits […] we haven't compromised the young people's integrity, I think. Which at least is something. So I do think we

deserve credit. [...]

Bridget: It's sad to say, but at the back of all our minds was always these targets. As much as we tried to do really good youth work for what young people wanted, at the back of our minds it was always there.

Laura: Yeah. Exactly.

Lucy: Or how can we find a way around it? Like, can we watch a film that young people have made *about* the police? You know.

Laura: Yeah. Exactly. And the young people even feel that. […] And that's what annoys me, that these targets, it's proving them right. They *know* what it's all about.

Both of these stories are inspiring because they show that part-time grassroots youth workers can take a stand and make a difference on a local level. These workers refused on principle to do what had been required of them, without their projects being shut down as a result. There were costs, however: Tracey's organisation lost significant income, Bridget lost some of her hours, and all of the workers found it extremely stressful to challenge their funders. Would their successful resistance embolden them in future, or were they left feeling professionally and emotionally vulnerable? My impression was that they felt both strong and fragile as a result of their resistance, proud of acting on their principles but experiencing residual fatigue, worry and anger. Tracey felt her competence as a youth worker had been called into question, had stopped attending local authority partnership meetings, and when I met her she was planning to leave her job – not only because of this experience, but it seemed to have played a role. Bridget became disillusioned with detached work and focused instead on employment support work, which she felt gave her more autonomy despite also carrying onerous targets. Lucy and Laura worked harder than ever to meet their remaining targets, to show their employer that they were ‘good employees’ (see previous chapter), in order to justify or mitigate their refusal to work with the police.

It is difficult to know what conclusions can be drawn from these stories and the different experiences of other workers. Those like Olly and John who were relatively happy to work with the police seemed to be coming from a different starting point. Olly worked in a local authority where diverting young people from crime was seen as the main purpose of detached work, and John was proud to be trusted to represent his employer at important meetings, where he felt young people's voices would be heard. It may or may not be coincidental that Olly and John worked for local authorities (subject

to direct legal responsibilities with regard to crime prevention) while Tracey, Bridget, Laura and Lucy worked for voluntary sector organisations with the autonomy to turn down or re-negotiate funding. It may also be relevant that Olly and John worked in small southern towns and rural areas, whereas Tracey worked in a larger northern town with a significant working-class population, and Bridget, Lucy and Laura worked in a disadvantaged area of a London borough.

Those workers who refused to work with the police were not acting as maverick individuals; all had vital moral and practical support from their colleagues and took a collective approach to their resistance. Tracey relied on support from her management committee and chairman, reinforced by the Christian ethos of her organisation. Lucy, Laura and Bridget supported each other, and their refusal was consistent with their principled ethics and definitions of detached work. As national policy is decentralised and played out differently in each local context, it makes some sense for workers to respond in different ways to particular local situations. What might be lost here is any sense of solidarity and mutual learning from colleagues in similar situations across different localities and organisational contexts. This seems to be the case in relation to electronic database monitoring, too, where the detached workers in this research seemed to have less confidence around engaging in direct or overt forms of resistance.

Tracking and databases

In this section I want to explore the involvement and resistance of youth workers in relation to a different form of surveillance – the use of electronic databases to 'track' the involvement of young people in youth services. The steep rise in the use of monitoring databases is partly explained by the growth in audit cultures discussed in the previous chapter. When nationally mandated benchmarks were introduced for youth work under the *Transforming Youth Work* agenda (DfES, 2002), English local authorities were required to calculate the percentage of the youth population they had contacted as well as keeping track of how many times each young person had been involved in the services and whether they had achieved the required 'outcomes' (see Table 7, page 136). In this context it was not possible for local authorities to continue with their traditional informal methods of recording youth work. These systems generally followed the principle that paperwork should be kept to a minimum and shared with as few people as

possible. The following advice to youth workers in the 1960s remained common practice up until the early 2000s:

> Your records are your personal property and primarily for your own use. Keep them in a private place; only you can decide when and how to share them with others. (Goetschius, 1962)

'Paperwork' in youth clubs before *Transforming Youth Work* would generally have included attendance registers, observations and evaluations on sessions, and membership or parental consent forms. Detached workers would tend to keep even less written information, instead building up a working memory of nicknames, real names, family members and where different groups were to be found. Evaluation recordings have long been integral to good detached youth work practice, but would rarely include identifying details for young people (Burgess & Burgess, 2006; FDYW, 2007). Detached workers in recent decades would require parental consent forms for trips; however, like the session recordings, consent forms would not be shared beyond the immediate team. For many decades, information would only be shared by detached workers in relation to medical emergencies or child protection. The situation today is completely different.

Normalising databases

The introduction of youth work databases over the last decade marks a significant departure from the established methods of monitoring youth work. Now, bespoke database systems are purchased by local authorities from private sector software companies. These databases are often shared between youth work, youth support, case work, careers advisors and youth justice teams. Voluntary sector projects, if funded by the local authority, are also required to submit information to the relevant database. Youth workers now have to ensure that every young person who they meet is registered on the database, that their personal details are recorded (for example, name, address, date of birth, ethnicity and sexuality), that every attendance is logged for each session, and that progress against targets is recorded and evidenced. Some of the issues surrounding this in terms of administrative workload and worker identity were discussed in the previous chapter.

The surveillance implications are that it is now possible for anyone with access to the

database (often many hundreds of people in each local authority) to look up a young person and find out where they live, how they define their sexuality, and what youth project they attended the previous night. Unsurprisingly, the software companies sell their databases on technical and financial grounds while minimising these ethical implications. For example, the 'market leading' software, Core+ IYSS, is described on its website as providing:

> … everything you would expect to allow the recording of activities, sessions, attendance and outcomes for young people... Multiple session records can be associated with any activity record each having an attendance list for young people, staff and volunteers; as well as a non-attendance list and the ability to create and evaluate outcomes... Ideal for services where youth work is commissioned to external providers... When used as part of an integrated solution the benefits are doubled. Data sharing, reporting, cost savings and improved service are just some of the benefits. (Career Vision, 2013)

By stating its ability to record 'everything you expect', this company underlines how normal it has become to have a service-wide database system rather than using pieces of paper. As this extract demonstrates, such systems are particularly useful (and particularly profitable for the company) if they are bought as part of an 'integrated solution'; in other words, if data is shared between different services. While information sharing and efficiency are assumed here to be inevitably beneficial, the surveillance aspects are absent from consideration, as is the *increased* workload on youth workers who had never previously been required to record these kinds of details. Similar assumptions are echoed in the description of another popular system, which:

> … involves gathering or sharing intelligence and information across a multi-agency environment (for example Schools, NHS, Social Care, Youth Services, Police, Cross Border, Charities) which can prove complex owing to the need for data sharing agreements, different systems, necessary security of data transfer, and the speed at which data can be shared to provide real time information to save costs and most importantly protect lives. (Capita One, 2013)

Here, Capita first argues its case in terms of efficiency and cost savings, mentioning afterwards the 'most important' protection of lives. It is perhaps debatable how a detached youth worker might protect a life by recording the names and contact details of the young people they met last night in the park, and yet ‘information sharing’ has become an assumed ‘good thing’, whatever the context. The introduction of databases was initially controversial amongst detached workers, who have always emphasised the

importance of waiting for young people to divulge personal information about themselves at their own pace (de St Croix, 2009c; 2009d). Workers now have a choice: ask each young person to fill in a form as soon as possible (as tends to be required officially by employers), wait until they know the young person better, or record only those contacts whose personal details are already on the system. One of the indirect results of the introduction of databases is that young people not recorded on the database no longer 'count' for monitoring purposes. Some local authority employees are *not permitted* to work with any young person who does not agree to their data being recorded in this way.

> At the end of a networking meeting of youth organisations in our neighbourhood, we chat about organising a joint trip together. One worker says he can get the funding to pay for it, as long as all of the young people fill out his membership forms so he can enter them on 'the system'. My colleague and I say that we always give young people a choice over whether they are willing to share their details, and some have said no – we are not willing to exclude them from the trip on this basis, but perhaps we can pay for them separately, from our own budget? The manager of another organisation says her forms also give this choice, but 'nobody ever ticks no'. The first youth worker laughs cynically, saying, 'Our young people can tick no, but if they do I'm not allowed to work with them!'
>
> (Research diary, January 2013)

Questioning and resisting

Although youth service databases may not be the most serious form of surveillance that young people face, they are important partly because they fundamentally change the relationship between detached youth workers and young people. This is particularly the case in a street-based setting, where detached workers who present themselves as 'different' to other services are now required to gather young people's information for the shared database. All of the detached workers I spoke to were unhappy about gathering young people's details on the street.

> Obviously if someone came up to me, and I don't care how many badges you've got, and they're trying to get my name and address, '*No!*' You've got to know kind of what it is that you're asking of young people. Be respectful of them. So if they do turn round and say no, for me it's not a tick box exercise. (Quincie)
>
> It's always good practice never to ask names or anything like that [...] Because young people are not stupid, they will think straight away, being a detached

> youth worker is a very unique youth work so it *has* been around for many years, but young people still in many areas still think, still see them as undercover police officers. (Mahad)

It is clearly of vital importance for Quincie and Mahad to distinguish themselves from the police and to respect young people's right to privacy. Their comments are typical amongst the detached workers I interviewed for this study. They also echo the findings of an earlier small study on youth work databases (de St Croix, 2009d), in which detached workers spoke of their struggles to be allowed to enter anonymous contacts on the system.:

> I've already had the argument with my Principal Officer about anonymity and young people that want to remain anonymous, and obviously for my detached workers and my mobile workers I don't want them having to go out and be pressurised into getting names, addresses, postcodes. So we are still arguing with regard to being able to enter people anonymously.
>
> It's a nightmare because you can't put in anonymous group contacts or anonymous individual contacts at all, which we used to be able to do but they decided to change it and go with the newer system [...] now the firmer line has been brought in that, you must get dates of birth, you must get surnames, you must get addresses.
>
> We just put everyone in as anonymous, and they've just got onto us and said, 'Who are all these anonymous people?' And we're like, 'I don't know!' And they're like, 'They can't all be anonymous', and we're like, 'They are'. So they're kind of a bit not happy with the way we've been anonymising contacts, so we're sort of in an early fight stage.
>
> (Detached youth workers, quoted in de St Croix, 2009d)

In my current research several years later, detached workers remain engaged in struggles over young people's right to choose and the need for an option to record anonymous or pseudonymous contacts. Mahad and his team successfully campaigned to be able to make entries for ‘anonymous’ young people on the database of their inner-city London borough:

> And even though it is a horrible thing to put that stats into the system, you know, we've got really no choice about it, but the good thing that we have is that we can put that young person as anonymous. […] We follow young people's feedback […] We've said to management we want that to be recorded as it is. (Mahad)

John explained that the computer system used in his youth service had previously not

enabled the counting of anonymous contacts, but that this had recently changed due to an update in the software:

> With this system we can put in saying we met 5 males or 5 females or just 5 people. So if you don't have their names it doesn't actually sort of matter in a way, because with this system you can just say, 'We met this number of young people around this age group.' […] It's really handy for detached. (John)

The ability to enter street-based contacts without providing names, addresses and dates of birth was an important concession won by these grassroots detached workers and their managers. The fact that a leading database provider changed its software to allow this seems like some kind of victory. Nonetheless, this technical change still leaves detached youth workers uncomfortable with the database systems, even if they have begun to see them as a 'normal' aspect of their working lives:

> It's easy to use, once you get used to it. Um. I mean - in, in some ways it feels like we're sort of watching the young people. (John)

> I'm sure a lot of the parents don't know that we've got that sort of information but literally you can just put someone's surname or first name and it tells you everything about them. And it's obviously linked to the other services so it tells you whether they've had a warning by the police and all that stuff and it's all on one database. […] And I think it's really wrong. (Louise)

As a volunteer, Louise has limited responsibility for the database. Her manager (who was critical of the system) agreed that it is important not to ask for any details the young people are not happy to give:

> We always get their first name, um, if they're willing to give us other stuff then that's fine, but we just kind of put whether they're male or female and their name. And then [manager] has a system which he's meant to then enter all their information in and that system's pretty much meant to have all the kids on the education roll in the [county] area so if he puts their name in he should then be able to find them. But we don't tend to do that, because he doesn't agree with having this database because it's meant to be voluntary, and it's meant to be confidential, and so we give them as little detail as possible. […] So far we've got away with it. (Louise)

Louise and her team clearly take a thoughtful and ethically informed approach, and yet it is not entirely clear here what it is they 'got away with'. This passage suggests they resist the use of the database, but Louise also told me that her team is doing well in terms of meeting its targets, targets that are calculated according to what is recorded on the database. They meet most of their targets not through their street-based work but

through young people involved in specific projects and one-to-one support. The norm amongst the detached youth workers I interviewed was a reluctant engagement with the system, a balancing of their desire to give young people choices with a need to perform as competent workers and teams.

> I don't agree with the reason of having those people's details [...] And I know that most youth workers do but then also they don't want to lose their job. (Louise)

It is difficult to know whether the fear of being sacked is over-stated amongst workers, but it seems an entirely reasonable and realistic fear in the context of ongoing cuts, reorganisations and redundancies. It is clear that the workers here are engaged in some level of negotiation and challenge regarding databases, at least by contesting universal information-gathering at street level. Several detached teams have been successful in winning concessions regarding the ability to enter anonymous contacts onto the system (although others have been unsuccessful, or have not attempted to challenge this policy). And yet, the idea of refusing to use the databases altogether - in the way that some workers refuse to work with the police - did not seem to have occurred to any detached worker even as a possibility that had been considered and rejected. While the two workers in this study from LGBT projects had successfully avoided engagement with database monitoring (as discussed in the previous chapter), detached workers (including myself) framed their struggle in a more individualistic way by arguing for young people's individual choice – in this way, we are engaging in resistance and collusion at the same time.

Resistance and accommodation

Weitz (2001) argues that most people engage in both resistance and collusion, or accommodation as she prefers to call it, in our everyday lives, and that we 'do not so much choose between the available strategies as balance and alternate them, using whichever seems most useful at a given time' (pp.682-3; see also MacLeod, 1993). She points out that accommodating to existing structures can offer for marginalised groups in particular 'a far more reliable and safer route to power, even if that power is limited' (p.683). Perhaps a balance of resistance (challenging and evading the systems) and accommodation (continuing to use the database) is the most rational response when jobs

and projects are at risk. But is rationality always the ‘best’ way to make ethical decisions?

As I explored in the previous chapter, performative systems such as monitoring databases encourage workers to act as compliant, self-monitoring subjects (Foucault, 1977; Ball, 2003; 2008; 2013). Because monitoring databases are the systems on which youth workers are judged, refusals are very difficult indeed – emotionally as well as practically. A passionate worker wants their work to be recognised (if not rewarded). In other words, a database that shows I have worked with no young people last week would not suit my self-image as a competent, committed and caring worker. If someone's work is judged by the contents of a database, not to use that database is almost unthinkable. Refusal renders the work – the work about which we are passionate, the work we love – invisible, non-existent. The database produces spreadsheets and numbers; there is a binary system that says we met our targets or we did not, and there is usually no room to explain any ‘failure’.

For youth workers, the views of young people are of vital importance in balancing resistance and accommodation (or collusion). Like many of the workers in this study, when I was required to use monitoring databases in my previous job, I always gave young people a choice over whether their details would be included, and like others I had to struggle with funders and managers even for this seemingly common-sense rights-based concession. Given the suspicions many of these young people had towards authority figures and their discomfort with giving away personal information in general, I was often surprised how few objected to sharing their information with the local authority. Perhaps the current generation of young people has been habituated to surveillance: many of them share sensitive information about themselves on social networks; their mobile phones track every movement they make; and many of their schools use fingerprint technology to charge them for their dinners and monitor their library loans. The databases used by their youth workers might seem to be just more of the same.

Detached workers' resistance in relation to databases is clearly small-scale and yet this does not mean it is pointless or ineffective; everyday resistance might spark changes on

a wider scale (Weitz, 2001, p.360). Perhaps, though, more radical action could have been possible, as is suggested by Mickie's and Lorne's refusal to use the databases for their work with LGBT young people (discussed in the previous chapter). Mickie and Lorne drew on principled political discourses to argue that database monitoring would 'out' young people as members of stigmatised sexual minorities. Young people who spend time on the street can also be seen as constituting a stigmatised group, as emphasised and challenged by the Federation for Detached Youth Work (FDYW) which organises conferences with names such as 'Positive about the street'. It is perhaps a missed opportunity that detached workers (including myself) have not argued more strongly, collectively and persuasively against surveillance ideologies, and in favour of young people's collective right to use and make decisions about public spaces.

Conclusion: Re-imagining the streets

Something to hide? (2)

Shay has no money for vodka so they make do with bubble gum and lie on the big swing, laughing and pretending to be drunk anyway. They see the youth workers coming through the park gate - Jenna drags her trainers on the ground to stop the swing and Shay leaps off hers with an ear-splitting screech, both running to claim the picnic bench where they like to sit.

Ricky empties a carrier bag of paper, juice cartons, pens and biscuits, while Jo looks serious and a bit embarrassed: 'This might sound funny, but is it ok if you fill out these forms? We need to give our manager some details about you. It's just, um, they're really impressed with you, that you're helping us plan the trip, but they keep telling us we need to give them information on who we're working with for our paperwork. It's just to prove we're working with real young people and not making it up. It's up to you. Is it ok? Or what do you think?' 'Yeah whatever,' Jenna says, pleased with the idea of somebody's manager being 'impressed' with them. Shay asks, 'Can we eat the biscuits now?'

Danny comes past on his bike, gives a screwed-up piece of paper to Ricky, grabs the biscuits from Shay and tips a couple into his mouth. Ricky smiles and says, 'Maybe see you later?' Danny nods, 'In a bit,' and is gone, dropping the pack of biscuits onto the table so half of them fall out. The girls grumble, looking to see how many are left and whether they're broken, Shay keeping one impressed eye on Danny who is doing a wheelie as he leaves the park. Ricky uncrumples the sheet of paper. Danny's membership form, at last - it's taken so long to get this back, he must really want to come to Alton Towers. Ricky scans down the form to check it's correctly filled in. After the question, 'Can we store your details on our database?', he's quite surprised to see that Danny or his mum has ticked 'yes'.

If the aim of detached youth work is to build supportive and educational relationships with young people on the streets, then requirements for detached workers to be involved in control and surveillance obstruct the core purpose and method of their work. Relationships with some young people (particularly those who are disengaged from other services) will not be possible if detached workers are seen or assumed to be working with the police, or sharing personal information with other agencies. Other young people, however, may not object to these practices, or might at least tolerate them in exchange for participation in the group, or an exciting trip. Surveillance in youth work is normalised through the reluctant consent of workers and young people, consent that is rooted in passion and care for their projects (they want them to remain open and to be seen as successful) and in their trusting relationships with each other. On the other hand, passion, care and relationships can also contribute to resistance, as discussed in chapter 4. Refusing to work with the police shows a passionate commitment to informal and non-authoritarian approaches to street-based youth work. Negotiating for the ability to record young people as anonymous contacts on database systems, or avoiding the street-level collection of data, demonstrates care for young people's privacy and a commitment to working on their terms.

This research suggests that grassroots youth workers exercise both resistance and collusion in relation to involvement in street-based surveillance. Resistance might take place on a small scale, perhaps through seemingly tiny decisions about when to ask a young person for their name, or whether to engage in conversation with a police officer

on the street. These everyday actions are important because they help to preserve an approach to detached youth work that proceeds from young people's terms and is situated at a distance from establishment systems. However, it is questionable how far such actions challenge societal assumptions about young people's use of the street, and the ethics of surveillance. For example: giving young people a choice over whether to have their information recorded on a database shows respect for rights to privacy and choice that are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef, 1989); however, this approach might subtly reinforce the idea of individual choice on the technical issue of data sharing, rather than involving young people as a group in considering the implications of the widespread use of databases. Involving young people in deciding whether to work with the police usually requires a more collective approach to decision making, but still might not go beyond a simple expression of opinion. We might wonder why young people said 'no' to Bridget, Lucy and Laura (who were already sceptical of working with the police), and 'yes' to Olly (who was already keen to do so). How much choice do young people really have when they are asked a question of this nature, beyond the choice to self-exclude?

I want to suggest that detached youth workers might think about placing a greater emphasis on critical engagement with young people over the issues that affect them on the streets. Such critical discussion and investigation are already happening in places, of course, but perhaps the emphasis of detached work overall has moved some distance from the idea of taking young people's side, and putting young people at the centre of the work. These older orientations towards youth work are, admittedly, somewhat simplistic – for example, we might want to question whether young people are such a cohesive group that it is possible to 'take their side', or think about what to do when groups of young people are in conflict, or when some groups of young people are oppressing other groups. However, such questions and tensions do not mean that the idea of 'taking sides' is not a useful and productive one for youth workers today.

Youth work theory has long been influenced by the radical Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who argued that education is never neutral and that educators must support the liberation of oppressed groups through critical reflection on their current situations, on possible futures, and on different ways to take action (Freire, 1988; Freire & Shor,

1987). Education in this view is about combining critical awareness and active engagement (hooks, 1994, p.13), where young people reflect on how they are oppressed as a group and what they might want to do about it. As M.G. Khan (2013) notes, exploring one's own oppression is often a difficult and risky process for both youth workers and young people from marginalised and dominated groups:

> To name your oppression is an act of courage, where often the language used has been pushed outside of the borders of common courtesy, political acceptability and generalisable truth and into the realm of delegitimised subjectivity, where personal, political and theoretical marginality are outcomes. (p.16)

Much of the discourse that underpins surveillance suggests that young people who spend time on the streets are deviant and must be watched, judged and controlled. Decisions about surveillance cannot be separated from this problematic rationale with its assumption that young people should be 'kept off the streets'. Surveillance mirrors other oppressions, and is aimed disproportionately at groups who are seen as being risky and/or at risk: black young people, young Muslims, working-class young people, young women who drink and have sex, activists, members of subcultural groups, disabled young people, sexual minorities, homeless young people, and those in local authority care. It is no coincidence that these are the groups that detached youth workers are most often funded to work with. In this context, is it any surprise that detached workers are asked to become watchers, reporters and information gatherers? The challenge is in what to do in response to these requirements.

Challenging surveillance, then, involves a process of critical understanding and critical action alongside colleagues and young people. It often means taking sides, refusing to misuse relationships with already marginalised groups of young people in ways that add to their experience of oppression. Hearing and acting on young people's views is an element of this work; it is also important to stimulate critical dialogue, working alongside young people to think collectively about the situation they are living in and how things might be different. The practitioner networks Federation for Detached Youth Work (FDYW) and In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) as well as the youth work trade unions have been critical of surveillance cultures, and might provide spaces for grassroots workers to think about and organise on these issues.

It is also useful to look beyond youth work, to make links with community and activist groups that are engaging critically around the use of the streets. Can the street be re-imagined as a public space for play, chat, debate, fun and creativity by people of all ages? The 'right to the city' movement is a useful concept and example here. It is a disparate international movement that has ebbed and flowed at different times since the 1970s, and involves local and global visions 'to remake the city and in the process change ourselves and how we live together, to create qualitatively different urban social relationships' (Lipman, 2011, p.160). The right to the city was initially theorised by Lefebvre (1996) who suggested that it had two main elements: a struggle for people's genuine participation in the decisions which affect urban life, and a demand for the right to physically occupy and use the spaces in the city. The right to the city is about a radical collective transformation of space:

> It is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (Harvey, 2008)

Many street-based activist movements have prioritised participative decision making, combining critique over the present situation with positive demonstrations of different ways to live. In recent years Occupy, the Turkish Gezi Park protests and other street-based movements have opposed the dominance of profit in urban life while experimenting with new ways of working and living. For decades, 'Reclaim the Night' marches have involved women in occupying the night-time streets in empowering protests against gender-based violence and intimidation. In the late 1990s, ‘Reclaim the Streets’ organised street parties in opposition to the dominance of the car and in favour of more liveable places, creating a vivid expression of protest against current conditions while envisioning a different world:

> The street, at best, is a living place of human movement and social intercourse, of freedom and spontaneity... The logic of this vision implies, not only ending the rule of the car and recreating community, but also the liberation of the streets from the wider rule of hierarchy and domination. From economic, ethnic and gender oppressions. From the consumerism, surveillance, advertising and profit-making that reduces both people and planet to saleable objects... This vision, which the street party embodies, is collective imagining in practice... A utopia defined, not as 'no-place', but as this-place, here and now. (Reclaim the Streets, 1997)

I am drawing on activism for inspiration here rather than necessarily suggesting that youth workers organise marches and occupy the streets as part of their job, although if young people initiate such ideas it might be appropriate for youth workers to support them. In addition, workers may also be involved in radical political action in their own right (whether inside or outside of their work time) and thus be positive role models for young people who want to change things. What I want to emphasise here is that youth workers have an important role in supporting young people to become aware of their own situations and what they might do collectively to change them. I am suggesting a subtly different attitude that re-emphasises and reclaims the idea of taking young people's side. Perhaps this starts with a willingness to share dilemmas with colleagues and young people, more overtly discussing workplace issues and the satisfactions and risks of resistance. It could be about asking different questions that might include some issues of individual choice ('Can we store your details on a database?') as well as wider and more collective critical reflection ('What are these databases for? In whose interests?') A more critical attitude does not preclude youth workers from responding to young people's problems with care and support; what I am suggesting is that we might also link their private troubles to public issues (Mills, 1959).

Critical conversations do not need to be planned and neither do they need to be gloomy; they might involve 'just chatting, having a laugh and a row' (IDYW, 2011, p.27) or as Laura said, 'having really deep conversations about something really important to them'. Claiming and changing the streets might mean *using* the streets more often - having fun in public spaces, working creatively with and on the streets, as well as in other improvised and non-institutionalised spaces (Batsleer & Hughes, 2013). It might involve challenging the surveillance and oppression of young people on the streets, while also challenging young people themselves on how they see and treat others. It could involve visits to street protests, or learning about young people's struggles in other countries and at other times in history. It might mean enabling and encouraging the creative and communal use of the streets by groups of young people together and separately, laughing and playing, chatting and debating.

Several of the workers quoted in this chapter already use their workplace dilemmas as a topic of critical discussion with young people. And yet, at a time when youth work is

increasingly oriented towards 'risky' groups and predefined outcomes (Davies, 2013; Coussee et al., 2009; Tiffany, 2007), it seems a good idea for those of us involved in detached work to remind ourselves that we can be rebellious and creative on the street, despite persistent surveillance. If detached youth workers are to maintain relationships with young people who are sceptical of authority figures, we need to continue to resist our co-option into systems of surveillance and control. We also need to open for critical discussion the areas where we *are* co-opted, and what we might do. I hope in this chapter that I have celebrated the places where workers are already doing this, while also suggesting a re-invigorated questioning, challenging and resisting attitude in everyday interactions with young people.

Chapter 7
The world we want:
Idealistic youth work in neoliberal times

Throughout this thesis I have contrasted the love and passion grassroots youth workers feel for their work with a policy context that they often experience as harmful, restrictive and constraining. This chapter contributes further to this analysis while marking a departure in focus, style and research material. While the thesis so far has been informed and inspired by the views of grassroots youth workers in a variety of organisations around England, this chapter focuses on a single organisation, a youth workers' co-operative in Hackney, East London. Voice of Youth is an attempt by a group of grassroots youth workers to do things differently; this organisation actively opposes and avoids some of the most restrictive forms of funding and aligns itself with values of equality and participation. There is no formal hierarchical management structure, decisions are made collectively in small working groups or at co-operative meetings, and all workers are paid the same hourly rate. In contrast to many other organisations where grassroots workers are at the centre of face-to-face work while being marginalised in terms of decision-making (Bolger & Scott, 1984; de St Croix, 2013a), the part-timers and volunteers who make up the entire staff of Voice of Youth are fully engaged in running their own co-operative. Devoting a chapter to this organisation allows space to think in more depth about the potential for (and problems with) youth work that starts from radically alternative assumptions.

I have been involved in Voice of Youth (VOY) since February 2011 when I was part of a group of youth workers and young people who started meeting to discuss setting up a new organisation in an area where a group of small youth projects we were involved in were threatened with possible closure. Rather than replicating existing organisations, those who set up VOY wanted to create a space for youth work that was based on our shared principles, explicitly questioning and opposing the cultures of competition, targets and surveillance that have become characteristic of youth work in neoliberal times. By July we had registered as a workers' co-operative, and in January 2012 opened a weekly youth club on a local housing estate in Hackney. Soon we added a detached project on a neighbouring estate and another youth group on a third estate.

During my research as a PhD student I have worked as a volunteer and occasionally paid part-timer for VOY, averaging one evening per week of face-to-face work (mostly detached work with young people aged 8-19) and another half-day or so each week of meetings, discussions, planning or admin. My close involvement in VOY has kept me in touch with the realities of grassroots youth work practice while learning about the challenges of attempting to 'practice differently'.

My own involvement in Voice of Youth is partly inspired by a small but rich history of youth work organisations that challenge the status quo (see de St Croix 2009a; 2009b). These include the socialist Clarion Clubs of the early twentieth century (Prynn, 1976); the experimental 'Branch Street' play project of the 1940s (Paneth, 1944); the libertarian Paint House youth club of the 1970s (Daniel and McGuire, 1972); and the explicitly feminist and anti-racist youth work of the 1970s and 1980s (Batsleer, 2013b; Spence, 2014; Feminist Webs, 2008; Irving, 2011; John, 2006). Throughout this history, critical and alternative approaches to youth work have shared common goals and methods with radical approaches to schooling, adult education, play work, social work and community work (Wright, 1989; Neill, 1971; Suissa, 2010; Lovett, 1988; Lambert & Pearson, 1974; Bailey and Brake, 1975; Curno, 1978; Gerrard, 2013; Bazeley, 1969; Cohen, 1998). Such histories act as inspiration and education for those of us interested in practising and organising differently.

While there is a small and yet inspiring literature of radical youth work from the past, present-day radical youth work is sparsely represented and this is one motivation for writing in more depth here about Voice of Youth. Although VOY is unusual today for its non-hierarchical structure and its refusal to accept funding that involves onerous targets or the surveillance of young people, it is by no means the only critical and principled youth organisation currently active in England. The longest lasting is probably the Woodcraft Folk, a socialist and environmental youth movement founded in 1925 that remains lively and active today (Davis, 2000). There is also an active network of feminist youth work (Feminist Webs, 2012) and there are other locally based critical and creative youth projects inspired by radical politics (Batsleer, 2013a; Batsleer & Hughes, 2013; Davies, 2000). From the USA there are stories of radical anti-racist youth organisers (Kwon, 2013) and feminist girls' work (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008).

However, written analyses of contemporary alternative and value-led youth organisations are not easy to find, perhaps because such organisations lack the time and resources to share their stories, or perhaps because they might be concerned about the negative reputational impact of being seen in public as critical of mainstream policy and funding. Slightly more has been written about current radical and alternative schooling projects (McGregor & Mills, 2014; Apple & Beane, 1999; Buras et al, 2010; Gandin & Apple, 2012; Richardson & Miles, 2003; Meier, 1995; Wrigley, 2006; Keddie, 2012). This chapter aims to be a modest complement to the histories and contemporary stories of radical, democratic, principled and alternative youth and education organisations. The purpose here is not to write a straightforward celebration of VOY but to reflect critically on a real-life, present-day example of a youth work organisation that was specifically set up to practice youth work according to idealistic principles.

This chapter is different in style as well as in content from the preceding chapters. At its core is a dialogue, collectively written and edited by seven of VOY's grassroots youth workers including myself (‘Doing something different in the world: Dialogues on equality in practice’, p.200 below). As a workers' cooperative, Voice of Youth relies on and believes in collective endeavour so it felt particularly inappropriate for me to write this chapter as a 'lone scholar'. Many of my colleagues have spoken about the co-operative at formal and informal events and some are writing about VOY for their own college and university projects, so it made sense to ask colleagues whether they would be interested in writing something together for my thesis, with the idea of sharing or publishing the results later. I did not want to burden my busy colleagues with onerous writing work, so as a compromise I suggested the idea of recording our conversations and editing these into written dialogue. In this I had been inspired by other examples of dialogical writing, particularly the method employed by Freire and Shor (1987) in their book, *A pedagogy for liberation.* These two critical educators describe this as their 'talking book', which they wrote through a series of taped conversations that were initially transcribed and edited by Ira Shor and later edited by both of them together. Adapting this format would, I hoped, enable us to create something that was genuinely collective while leaving the main responsibility (the transcribing and initial editing) with me.

At a planning meeting we decided we would organise and record two conversations to which all workers and volunteers would be invited: one discussing our principles, and another to address any remaining questions or issues we felt were important. We hoped that these would form a meaningful basis for a written piece, while also being an intrinsically useful process for VOY and for the individual participants. Our first recorded conversation took place at a workers' and volunteers' training residential weekend in summer 2013, a relaxed and positive environment where we could reflect on our work. I transcribed this conversation and edited it, aiming to reduce it in length and improve its clarity while retaining our characteristic voices and the conversational structure and atmosphere. Our second conversation took place later that year and addressed more specific areas; here, I edited some of our responses into composite answers and presented these as 'Frequently Asked Questions'. I sent the first draft of the piece to everybody and created a second draft based on feedback. We discussed this final draft together at a group meeting, settling on the version presented below.

In contrast with the rest of the thesis, this chapter does not anonymise the individual workers or the organisation Voice of Youth. We wanted our writing to contribute to the history of alternative youth and community work organisations as well as to inspire people trying to do similar things today, and we agreed by consensus that this would best be served by VOY being named. Each worker and volunteer had an informed choice about whether to take part, and was given an information sheet as well as the chance to discuss the research with me and with each other. Each had an individual choice over whether to use their real name or a pseudonym, and all participants were asked to respect the anonymity of any colleague who decided to use a pseudonym. Every worker and volunteer in VOY was happy to take part (although some were eventually unavailable on the day) and all chose to use their real names. Because we had chosen to be public in what we said, we avoided discussion of sensitive issues that might breach the confidentiality of young people and others.

Before our discussions we agreed to be self-critical and reflective about VOY's work rather than portraying it in an unrealistically positive light. Presenting radical youth work practice as a 'perfect' model to be copied might obscure the particular context that made it thrive; in any case, a 'warts and all' account can be more inspiring. VOY is not

presented by its workers as faultless, and we are willing to share the challenges we face. We are also keen to share our successes and the aspects we are proud of, and there is an important role for celebration alongside critical reflection when considering radical projects. It is common in critical research to expose every possible contradiction or compromise, leaving the writer in a safe position that might even act against the development of alternative approaches (Land & King, forthcoming). Reflecting on writing and editing their book Democratic Schools, Apple and Beane (1999, p.25) emphasise the importance of giving space for educators to tell hopeful and positive stories:

> Early on, we made a decision that these stories must be told in the words of the people involved. This is crucial. The feelings of frustration, and sometimes cynicism, that many educators and community members experience are often the result of not hearing each others' stories. Failure seems to make better headlines than hard-won, slow success.

What follows, then, is a collectively written series of dialogues between VOY's youth workers discussing how our principles work in practice, and sharing the dilemmas, challenges, joy and excitement of running an idealistic youth work organisation. I have left the piece intact as written and agreed by myself and my colleagues rather than inserting my own commentary. After the collectively written section I will discuss how VOY's grassroots workers experience their role and how this differs from (and is similar to) the experiences and perspectives of other workers in the study. I will then discuss more generally the potential for idealistic and prefigurative grassroots youth work organisations as a form of resistance to neoliberal youth work.

Doing something different in the world: Dialogues on equality in practice

This section is written collectively by: Tania de St Croix, Anna-Nina Koduah, Fionn Greig, Julia Betancour Roth, Keishaun Decordova Johnson, Carys Afoko and Emma Heard.

This piece is written by a group of youth workers who aim to challenge inequality and hierarchy through the ways we work with young people and each other. Voice of Youth (VOY) was formed in 2011 by youth workers and young people who wanted to do things differently. We began by talking about what we valued in youth work, and about

the things that got in the way. After a few months of meetings we registered as a workers' co-operative (or co-op), working non-hierarchically with no bosses, a flat pay rate, and making decisions by consensus. We draw on traditions of youth work in which young people choose whether and how to get involved, without pre-planned outcomes or adult-imposed programmes. One of the first things we did was to develop our five core principles:

1. Young people choose whether and how to become involved with our groups and our work.
2. Our work starts from the needs and wishes of young people in Hackney and all funding bids will reflect this.
3. We involve young people in taking action to improve their own lives and the lives of their communities.
4. We promote equality and challenge oppressive structures in society, institutions, groups and individuals, including in our own organisation.
5. We promote co-operative decision making in our own work, in our youth groups and in the communities where we work.

This piece takes the form of short dialogues between some of our youth workers on each of our five principles in turn. We try to do almost everything in groups so it seemed a good idea to write this piece collectively, as part of a tradition of critical educators who use dialogue as a basis for writing (see, for example, Freire & Shor, 1987, hooks & Scrapp, 1994, Taylor & Taylor, 2013 and Cohen, 1998). After planning how we would like to write, we recorded two group discussions which were transcribed and initially edited by Tania (mainly to make them shorter). Each of the authors has read the chapter and suggested further changes, and the final version (including this introduction) was discussed and agreed by the group. We use conversation all the time within the co-operative and with young people: to build relationships, share perspectives, address conflict, reflect and learn, and decide what to do and how to do it, so it seemed appropriate to ‘write’ this piece through speaking; as one of us said:

> Talking's a really powerful tool – you can really get through to someone by having simple conversations. (Anna-Nina)

We set up VOY because we were dissatisfied with the dominant models of youth work in the UK today, which are increasingly rigid, and which tend to start from agendas which label and stigmatise young people – particularly those who are black and/or working-class. Extensive funding cuts in recent years have led to the closure of many good youth organisations, with the survivors expected to compete for funding with often dubious agendas and requirements (IDYW, 2011). At the same time, young people are living with unprecedented levels of pressure, control and surveillance in their schools and on the streets. Now more than ever they need spaces where they can exercise freedom and cooperation, with adults who can challenge and support them outside of formal environments.

We hope our experiences will be useful to others working towards principles of equality and cooperation, whether now or in the future. Not because we think VOY is perfect, but because it is an overt attempt to challenge capitalist, authoritarian and hierarchical ways of working. Challenging the idea that 'there is no alternative', it could be seen as an example of utopian thinking in practice (see Francis & Mills, 2012). VOY makes us feel hopeful, and perhaps our story can inspire others, too – not to do as we have done, but to create diverse creative opportunities for anti-oppressive and cooperative work with young people.

Q: What does VOY do?

A: We work with young people in community buildings and on the streets of their local areas. *Currently we work weekly in three neighbouring areas of Hackney, a diverse London borough that has many strengths and faces many challenges. We work with young people through conversation, getting to know them and learning together about the issues that affect their lives. We support them to organise activities and projects around their areas of interest.*

Q: Why have principles and how do you use them?

A: When we started meeting to plan a new organisation, one of the first things we did was discuss and decide on five shared principles. *These helped bring us together and clarify the values we shared as a group or that we wanted to aspire to. We discuss these principles with new workers and volunteers, and with young people in our groups. We have reflected that changing the world can be a massive*

and overwhelming challenge, and that exploring and revisiting our principles helps us to break it down into smaller tasks, make better decisions, and check how our work is going. Read on as we discuss our principles in more detail, and see what you think!

Principle 1: Young people choose whether and how to become involved with our groups and our work.

Julia: In a lot of settings young people *have* to come, maybe as part of youth offending orders or because it's part of their school day. In our groups, the young people come because they *want* to and they choose how to take part.

Emma: If they have the autonomy over what we do or how we do it, or how to become involved, it's also going to give them more energy to be part of it, isn't it? So you're not just getting dragged along because you have to do it - you actually really *want* to be there. But in a lot of places that's been forgotten. Is that because of funding? Or is that because people have that anxiety about young people, and the idea that they need to be engaged in 'positive activities' whether they like it or not?

Keishaun: For me, this principle is about building up confidence in our young people. You're told to go to school, it's not really your choice. But being allowed to go to a youth group and being allowed to choose whether you just want to sit in a corner with your friend on your phone and just sit there, do nothing - or whether you want to get involved, talk to the workers, start planning - it's building up their confidence within themselves. You're allowed to have your own mind, you're not forced to go to one place, and you don't have to act like everyone else. You might be playing cards, sitting down, doing cooking or having a discussion with a worker. It's not a space where everyone has to do exactly the same thing. Everyone can come and choose what they do within the club, which is why we try to provide a range of activities.

Carys: See, that's why I think choice is so important when you're young. It's about youth work not being the same as school. It's really important to have a space where you're treated as a person and you can choose.

Julia: You just reminded me of something I noticed the other day in one of the groups. A young person had just arrived a bit earlier with his cousin who was visiting, and then his cousin left because some of his relatives came by. And this young person who comes every week said, 'I'm gonna go home', but looked a bit guilty at the same time. And I remember Fionn asking why, but in a very accepting way. And they had a bit of a conversation about it and Fionn sort of acknowledged, 'Is it because your cousin went?', letting him know that it's completely fine. And the young person looked much more comfortable with it, and they both said, 'See you next week', and he left. It sounds like such a tiny thing but I really loved that conversation.

Fionn: Maybe he felt a bit obliged to stay? Because he's really keen and he knows we appreciate his presence and his passion for the club. And so by leaving, does he feel like he's letting us down? It was really important for me to say, 'Great, you're going to see your cousin,' even though inside I *was* disappointed that he was going. They have the right to choose when and how to be involved.

Emma: I think it helps that we don't have targets for our work, like when young people have to get a certain qualification. When there's more freedom around the funding, young people get to choose whether to participate. When there's more autonomy for us workers, then there isn't a pressure of 'You have to get it done' or, 'You have to stay.'

Julia: I agree completely, and that's what I liked so much about the conversation Fionn had with that young person. But there's another way of looking at it. Some time ago I was working with a group outdoors, it was really cold, and two young people used to stay for the whole session, and they would ask, 'When are we gonna be done?' We would say to them, 'You can go whenever you want'. But I started thinking they were there because they felt a bit bad for us. And on the one hand I don't want them to come just for our sake, but on the other I felt it was a very beautiful sign of respect and trust as well.

Tania: Yeah. Young people choose whether and how to become involved, but that doesn't stop us workers from *encouraging* them to stay sometimes. It's great to make them feel comfortable to come and go as they please. But I also think it's really nice that

we do encourage them to be there, and make them feel cared for, that we actually want to spend time with them. As long as they can go whenever they like, and they're free to leave.

Emma: In another one of our groups, someone came who we'd never seen before and that day it was all young women there so he was the only young man. He walked in and he looked like he didn't want to be there, and we said 'Come and have a seat' and he very casually, very shyly sat down. And then I said, 'Play a game of cards?' and he did. And by the end of the session he was cooking! For the first minute I really wanted to say to him, 'It's alright, you can go if you want, I understand', because he looked so uncomfortable, but he stayed and he seemed to have a really good time! So I suppose that's an example of what you were saying. Yes, they *are* free to leave, but we do encourage them to stay and see what it's like!

Q. What do the young people do in their groups?

A. Young people plan what to do: *it might be cooking, group games, hanging out, serious conversations, table tennis, football, drawing, film, colouring, drama, treasure hunts, walks, chatting, free running, art stuff, trips, weekends away, more chatting, educational workshops, made-up games... We usually start with what comes up when we're talking, or with what's there in the environment. Youth workers also make suggestions. The activities are usually informal, but sometimes we decide to work together on a more focused project or campaign. After the 2011 London riots the young people created discussions and a participative community performance, to challenge perceptions of why the riots happened and challenge how young people are negatively portrayed. More recently, one group has made a brilliant short film about how schools (especially academies) often undermine their human rights and members of the group have taken it out to different groups to discuss rights in schools.*

Q. What kind of young people do you work with?

A. They're all different! *They're funny, brilliant, thoughtful, surprising... We sometimes find this question difficult because it's as if people want us to put a label on the young people we work with. We work in housing estates which are sometimes seen as disadvantaged or deprived, but we don't start from a deficit*

perspective – these spaces have their problems but they are also diverse, exciting and strong communities. We mainly work with 8-19 year olds although we're flexible. The doors are open - each person comes for their own reasons which they might or might not share – for example, they might come because it's a safe space, a free space, different from home or school, to take time out, to see friends, to have a break from their problems, and because they like activities or the youth workers or the other young people.

Principle 2: Our work starts from the needs and wishes of young people in Hackney and all funding bids will reflect this.

Emma: Young people's needs and wishes are so diverse, and there's lots of stereotypes about what people think young people need. A lot of the time young people are categorised and not asked, 'What's important for you?' I enjoy asking young people one-to-one or in a little group, 'What do you want, what do you need?' I think it's a really good thing for young people to be listened to and know that their opinions count.

Fionn: And then to see it to fruition, a funding bid coming in or a project starting: we've listened and we've made something happen *together*. In one group they were talking about wanting snacks, and I found out about a funding opportunity. We brought it to the club and wrote that application together, and got a healthy café off the ground. And they really have ownership over it, they all want to help in the kitchen. And if you'd imposed that, would they all be saying they want to help? Their enthusiasm is proof of the importance of that principle.

Tania: Yeah, and part of it is having young people involved as workers, running the organisation.

Anna-Nina: Yeah. I think the principle really goes well with the name of our co-op, Voice of Youth, which was a name young people chose and voted for. The name is about the voice of the young people and what they want to see happen or change, and what they want to do. They're the base of our work.

Emma: Sometimes there's a difficulty, though. Young people aren't often asked in their lives what they want or what they think they need, so when in groups we try and plan 'What do you want to do?' they can't think of anything.

Fionn: Yes, or they give a very limited range of answers. And is that because those answers are what they're used to from other clubs, or from school, or society?

Keishaun: I found it difficult recently when trying to organise a trip with some of our older ones, where I've asked them and they've had no ideas for weeks. So, at what point do we as workers - not stop asking - but just make a decision? That's something that I've found challenging because I didn't know when to stop asking them.

Emma: It's a challenge for us to work with them in a creative way to inspire new ideas. Remember when we got them writing ideas with chalks on the floor? That really worked, just being creative to help them explore what they want. Because a lot of them don't get listened to much outside of the group.

Tania: And sometimes asking a question can be limiting. It's also about being there, and reading between the lines of conversation. When we did a project about the riots it wasn't because we asked, 'What should we do a project about?' It was because everyone on the streets was talking about the riots. Everyone was like, 'What do you *think* about this?' From that, we workers asked young people, 'Would it be interesting to do a project about this?' And so many of them said, 'Okay, yeah, let's do it!'

Anna-Nina: I think the way the principle is worded is good. It says 'Our work *starts* from the needs and wishes of the young people'. So even something like asking their opinion on snacks for a picnic: they list sweets and chocolate, and then we also bring carrots and hummus for them to try and they end up liking that too. So we're there to encourage them to try new things as well.

Carys: Yes, because asking that open question people can just end up with the same things. Because otherwise, if you can't think of something new, you don't get to try new things.

Emma: One evening I decided we'd go down to central London and do a walk, just spot things and talk about them, and I prepared a bit of a quiz. And they really enjoyed it. Probably if you'd put down on the table, 'Do you want a walk around central London?' they'd say, 'No'. But it was a giggle and they learned a few things and they taught us things.

Fionn: Recently we organised a trip to the theatre, and when I said the words gender and sexuality, being *proud* that the play was about that, then some of them thought, 'No way am I going to that!' Only two came but they loved it, and when the others hear back from their peers that'll be ten times better. This principle for me is about balancing what we've all been talking about. So our work starts from their needs and wishes - whether we've been discussing it, whether they've identified it, or whether they've just been interested in it. And then it's about building *our* confidence that it *is* our job to suggest things and sometimes to just *do* things, but without ever contravening their needs and wishes.

Emma: There's something I wanted to point out with this principle which we've not discussed: we say that funding bids should reflect young people's needs and wishes. Young people *want* money to do projects or special things. How creative can we be to not compromise our values, not be stereotypical or targeted or oppressive, but get funding to do a bit more?

Julia: Tania and I were writing a funding bid a while ago and we were like 'Oh no, we have to identify outcomes, argh!' But then we decided to write down outcomes that we actually do try to achieve, like challenging oppression. You can write it in quite a clear way and show examples of how this is done, and show that these things *are* difficult to measure but this is what we do, and we're very happy to talk about it and to show it.

Fionn: But that's the thing, who gets to choose the targets? A lot of funding bids will give you the targets and you have to just say, 'Yeah, we'll do them', or you can't apply.

Emma: We're lucky that we don't need much money to run, but some groups need money to keep people's jobs. It's really difficult, isn't it? Because you don't want to sacrifice people's livelihood and ability to work with young people. I don't know, it's very difficult and we're in a fortunate position where we can keep to this principle and really strive for it.

Julia: I still want to believe that we might be able to do both!

Fionn: And maybe pay ourselves eventually!

Carys: I like what's built into this principle, the idea of maybe trying to challenge funding. In some charities there's a bit of a mentality of, 'This is what we have to do'. Well, no, you could actually push back, or you could *not* apply for that money. I think that's what's interesting about it.

Q. Is it possible to get funding while sticking to your principles?
A. We hope so... *We're new and small, and there's very little funding available for open access youth work, but we have found enough to keep three regular groups going every week and to pay our youth workers for some of their work. We can run on a limited income because we do a lot of voluntary work and because local groups support us, for example with free access to buildings. We deliberately decided to stay small and grassroots, and we don't need funding for management or fancy premises. It would be great to be able to raise enough money to employ some of our workers on regular part-time wages so they could rely on the income and so we could do a bit more. It's something we are still learning about.*

Q. What do you do when workers and young people disagree?
A. We talk about it. *We involve young people at every level of the cooperative, but we are clear that decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the youth workers at cooperative meetings. Some of us workers are young people who have grown up in the area so we have a good idea of young people's views, but we also need to discuss it with young people in our groups because they might have different views. Currently we have an issue where we disagree: the most committed members in one group want young people to be banned if they misbehave,*

whereas the youth workers do not want to exclude anybody. We feel that our work starts from the needs and wishes of all of the young people in our groups, including those who find it difficult to get along with others; on the other hand, some young people might self-exclude if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This is a real dilemma and we are appreciative that the young people have brought it up. We hope that the young people in our groups know that we want to hear their ideas and that we will take them seriously, and if it's something where we disagree, we will keep thinking and talking together about what to do.

Principle 3: We involve young people in taking action to improve their own lives and the lives of their communities.

Keishaun: Speaking for myself, youth work has been so helpful and such an encouragement in my life, when I was a young person in the area and some of you were my youth workers, just the activities that were run and the opportunities that were given, even the discussions we had. And from that point I went from being a young person in the group, and I never thought I would become a youth worker, to becoming a volunteer and then becoming an actual full-blown youth worker. So I think this principle is about encouraging young people to take responsibility for their own lives, thinking about their future, their careers, and what they really want in life. It's just a nice thing. And the lives of their communities, because being a part of your community like I got involved in mine just opens up doors. So I want to involve and encourage other young people to take part and do the same with their communities, take leadership and take responsibility.

Emma: Often young people are very disheartened. But where you come from or how you've been brought up or the way you are, that doesn't have to impact on the rest of your future, and it's giving that confidence and hope that you can make things better for yourself, and we're all here to support that. And you need someone telling you, 'If you want to do that you can. You can make things better.' I just think it's a very special and lovely kind of ethos.

Julia: For me, this principle has to do with what you have already described but also on a different scale, like young people questioning what their lives are and what other

people's lives are on a political level, because it doesn't have to be the way it is. To encourage them to see themselves not just as individuals but part of a group in society, and the potential of maybe not accepting certain roles that are given to them.

Anna-Nina: Where it says 'Improve their own lives and the lives of their communities', we want them to have a good life in a nice community. Then it also says 'We involve young people in taking action', and that's the whole point of VOY. Instead of us saying, 'We're gonna change your life', we want them to realise that *they* can do it.

Fionn: And I think that's really important, to have the belief from us that they can do it. It's not just about 'positive activities' for young people, it's actually about being political. Because even just trying to get heard or trying to change your own life is an act of politics. It's different from that idea of other people swooping in to *help* or *save* a group. For me this is not about philanthropy or charity, it's about empowerment.

Emma: That reminds me of a project we did with another group who wanted to celebrate Hackney and made their own book to show their feelings that 'Hackney's actually okay and we're well-rounded young people living in Hackney'. And so when we talk about taking action it's not necessarily fighting the negative but promoting the positive as well. So that principle is very broad, isn't it?

Carys: Yeah, because you don't just want to create a great youth group where young people have a really great time and then when they're eighteen we say, 'Bye, good luck with the rest of your life'. It's recognising that people are in a community and it's not just about creating a nice safe haven for people to come - we also want to help empower people to be able to do that in other bits of their lives. Taking the positive things they have in their youth group and trying to bring that to other things.

Tania: A lot of youth organisations have some sort of mission statement around 'changing young people's lives' and often it's too individualised. People have a certain amount of power, but it's only if you work together in groups, in communities, that you've got more chance to make a change. The project about the riots, I think it made everyone who took part feel a bit differently, not just about the riots but about

themselves and the importance of having a say and being listened to and all the different ways they could express themselves. One of them said, 'I've never had a discussion like this at school or anywhere'. They created a space and time to discuss and question, and reflect, and think, 'Yeah, we can do something'.

Julia: Yes, and it doesn't even have to just be a political project. It can be through everyday youth work. It's the whole idea of communicating in a different way. It's the space of maybe learning how to challenge people, both young people and also adults, so you can actually be heard. And that can be on so many different levels, so it can be a big political project but it can be something completely unrelated that leads to a different approach in how you talk and discuss.

Fionn: Everything's political.

Julia: Everything's political, exactly.

Emma: I was just thinking, young people always end up talking about the police in our groups, and a young person came in one day and she said, 'You'll never guess, the police came to our school and I challenged them on a few things'. And we didn't encourage her to do that, we didn't tell her to do that. It all grew from our discussions, but *she* wanted to bring it up.

Carys: It was like she felt empowered because of those discussions, so when the police came in she could say, 'Well, this is what I think'. That's quite a cool thing because it means she doesn't need a youth worker to be there, it means that's how she's going to be always. You don't need to be there behind her, going 'Go on, you can do it!'

Julia: I feel we go against certain norms and we challenge a lot of things that otherwise are the status quo within society, and that in itself is extremely empowering. We're not putting the thoughts in the young people's heads - most of the time those thoughts are already there - but from feeling alone, all of a sudden there's a space where you can express yourself and feel, this is *real*.

Q. Do VOY workers and volunteers all share the same values and beliefs?
A. Yes and no. *We don't always agree on everything and it would be a bit worrying if we did! We have different backgrounds, experiences and ways of expressing things. But our shared values and principles are important, to clarify what we are about and to protect VOY from agendas imposed from outside. When we discuss what we have in common we identify things like: respect and care for young people and for each other, commitment to equality, passion for youth work and young people, and belief in co-operating.*

Q. What happens when co-op members disagree amongst themselves?
A. We discuss it and take time to think about it. *We try to listen, understand other perspectives, and stay open-minded even while upholding our own principles. Telling each other when we disagree or feel angry or uncomfortable (and expressing this in a caring way) shows our respect for each other. Even if we have the occasional difficult or frustrating moment, we hope it will make us stronger in the long run - and that we'll still be working together tomorrow, next week, and in the longer term.*

Principle 4: We promote equality and challenge oppressive structures in society, institutions, groups and individuals, including in our own organisation.

Carys: I like this principle because it's a value statement. It's like, there is oppression in the world, there is inequality in the world, and we're here to challenge it. So in the groups, that means things like when the boys are playing football and they're excluding the girls we don't stand by the side and go, 'That's alright'. We try and encourage them to let the girls play and we challenge them if they make sexist comments. And we're not going to have the female volunteers do all the washing up in the kitchen, the men will do it as well. I think it is maybe a more controversial principle but I think that's important because it's a statement of what we believe.

Julia: I think it's interesting that you used the word 'controversial'. It is kind of interesting that promoting equality and challenging oppressive structures is controversial in today's society!

Carys: I think promoting equality is less controversial, but I think saying we're 'challenging oppressive structures', saying that schools or the police are oppressive structures, that isn't something that is a widely accepted thing.

Emma: Can I ask: why do we *personally* promote equality and challenge oppression? I feel it's important because in my life I've seen people being treated unfairly. I've got a passion for history, I've got a passion for looking at oppressed societies, so that's why it's very important to me. But it's interesting why we feel this is important whereas lots of other youth groups don't feel promoting equality and challenging oppressive structures *is* part of their youth work.

Keishaun: You don't see equality any more, everyone is living their life based on labels or based on values that aren't themselves. No one seems to love or take care of themselves. They're only happy if they have the latest name-brand clothing, everyone is being oppressed, and no one seems happy any more. As a youth worker I want young people to be happy within themselves. And not going to school and then being oppressed by teachers saying 'Oh you're getting a D', or 'You're only getting a B, you should be getting an A.' Qualifications don't determine a young person's whole life. As youth workers we encourage people and say that no matter how you are doing in school, you always have a chance. I think everyone has the right to be equal. Whether you're black, whether you're light-skinned black or you're dark-skinned, whether you're white, in our youth clubs everyone has the right to be equal and to take part in everything, no matter their shape, size, background. And we promote our groups to be accessible to everyone. No matter what you like, whether it's different types of music, different types of clothing.

Fionn: For me it's really important to recognise how oppression works in society, not individualise things as if, 'You are homophobic' or 'You are sexist'. It's more, 'Where do you think that belief or comment arises from, or why do you think that?' And actually recognising that we're affected by the society we live in, which is oppressive on many levels. And so, massively, are the children and young people we work with, who maybe don't have the tools yet to critique everything that they're being taught. So for me this is about saying, we challenge that view in a young person, because we recognise that it's a

homophobic view or a sexist view because of the structures in society. Just by saying, 'Hm, *why* is it "not natural" to be gay?' - just one question challenges the structure.

Julia: Personally, for me, it's intrinsic in youth work to challenge oppressive structures. But also I think it's something that we're constantly questioning and looking at in the way that we work as colleagues. For instance, I'm aware that I'm older and I might have a bit more experience in youth work, and there are younger workers in the organisation. Or, we all have different backgrounds. I'm very aware of that when I say things or in how I work.

Keishaun: We promote equality and challenge within our organisation. For me, being a younger worker, I feel my voice is equally heard to those who have more experience or even more qualifications than I do within the same field. If we were discussing a workshop, it's not that my voice wouldn't be heard. If I said something, my colleagues will understand where my point of view is coming from if they can't see it for themselves, because my background is growing up in the area and I'm closer to the young people's age, whereas some of my colleagues might have come from a different area and see it differently. It's understanding that we all have different views on things but in the end all our goals are the same, so we're trying to bring ourselves to an equal level to make sure that we bring the best to the young people.

Julia: Exactly! But it's also that we have a climate where we can challenge each other. If we say something, someone else can say, 'Mm, I'm not entirely convinced by that'. We would really want to work through something if we're not completely convinced by something someone's said. Without judging that person, but by having a conversation about it. The same way we would with young people.

Tania: I also like the fact that we are all paid the same hourly rate. Because sometimes organisations say, 'Yeah, young people have a full voice in our organisation, they're on the board' but then you ask, 'Who's paid?' And people on the top pay are – to generalise - usually white, middle-class and older. If you're really saying young people should have an equal voice or should run the organisation, then look at pay because it's a marker of how people are respected. The fact that we're all paid the same hourly rate in

VOY, it's saying that if you're a young person who has that expertise of knowing what it's like to be a young person in that area, and putting in as much work as everyone else, why shouldn't you get paid the same?

Fionn: By doing that we're saying a massive thing about society. We are doing something different in the world and that's really exciting.

Julia: I also want to say that challenging oppressive structures can be something fun, like the other week we had a painting session and one of the male workers painted his bike pink!

Fionn: One of the best times for me about challenging structures is when young people feel free enough to be able to bring the question back to us. So when the young people asked for a meeting about whether or not we ban people, or who we choose to come on trips, for me their confidence in being able to ask for that is about saying that young people should be able to ask for things in their area, their space, their youth club. And the fact that we responded to that really positively shows that we're up for that, turning the world on its head and being challenged. I think that's really positive.

Q. How does it work in practice not having bosses or managers?
A. It's great! *We can work in the interests of young people, and make decisions together, rather than being told what to do by someone at a higher level who is not accountable to us or to the young people. We are collectively accountable through co-operative meetings. We support each other informally, and each of us has regular one-to-one support meetings with an experienced youth worker. We share out tasks so we don't all have to think about everything all the time, and we work in pairs or small groups so we're not isolated.*

Q. What does it mean to challenge oppressive structures in your own organisation?
A. We try to recognise, think about and act on potential and actual inequalities within VOY*, through discussions, training and reflection. We are a diverse group (for example, in terms of gender, 'race', class, sexuality and age) and we see this as a strength; however, there is clearly the potential for the inequalities in wider*

society to be reflected by informal hierarchies in VOY, however much we try to work as equals. We are currently thinking about how to do more to recognise oppressive and unequal structures in VOY, and what we can do to change and challenge them on an ongoing basis.

Principle 5: We promote co-operative decision making in our own work, in our youth groups and in the communities where we work.

Anna-Nina: We all bring something to VOY: different ages, different sexes, backgrounds. It's stronger when everyone comes together and when we're all different, because we can bring more to the group. We also work cooperatively with young people in their groups, because we don't want big hierarchical boundaries and we don't want them to see us as being like their teacher. We don't want to be seen as telling them what to do, or like we're better than them or more experienced. They learn from us and we learn from them. And in the community, working cooperatively helps build that kind of good relationship.

Keishaun: That just reminds me of how we first started. We could barely decide on where to start! It took us how many months? Just to figure out what area we wanted to start in, how many clubs we should open, where we should work.

Anna-Nina: Sometimes it is really long! But it's interesting. It takes a while because we all have to meet and then we all have to make decisions together. But it's better, I think, because we all know what we're doing and we've all chosen to do it. We've all said what we wanted to do and we've made it into one.

Emma: It can get tricky sometimes when trying to decide between our ways of working and what the young people want, for example about banning. If there was a vote young people would vote to ban young people who misbehave, whereas we would not endorse that. It's about working cooperatively, giving them a space to talk about this, and giving our reasons as to why we don't want to do that. But it can get tricky at those points when you're in conflict.

Fionn: I think what's really beautiful about this is that we value time. Decision making cooperatively isn't encouraged by our world as it stands, a world that thinks efficiency

and capitalism is the only answer, and if you do things efficiently then you're more successful. But who's excluded from that? Who's not heard? Who feels abused, or who feels ignored? And so I think that's key, having the time to discuss things through.

Anna-Nina: I think it's quality over quantity. We try and do better work rather than rushing it and doing it more.

Tania: When we started I was really caught out by that, even though I was really inspired to be in a radical co-operative. In my working experience it was the norm that you had to get so much done and often as an individual. When we started, several times I would go off and do something on my own, and I've had to learn to be like, 'I think I'd like to do this, who wants to do it with me?' I'm still learning! We are really busy sometimes, but we always make space to consider, to talk to each other, to think and to try and work together.

Emma: We've also figured out on the way what works. For example, now there's two people responsible for every group or area of work, and those two can make a decision, we don't have to email all seven or eight members and get their responses before making a decision. If we're struggling or if it's a really big decision then we go back to the whole group. So it's finding out what works best for us and the way we work.

Julia: I feel as well there's a difference working with the young people when they know that nobody is the boss. I actually feel like the young people work more like that themselves when we have that approach.

Anna-Nina: I think you're inspired when you see something that works that you've never really thought about. I think a lot of the young people when they ask about the cooperative are quite fascinated that we all get paid the same and we haven't got a boss.

Julia: Now some of the young people have become young volunteers in a different group, and they are automatically taking responsibility. They just keep an eye out: 'What needs to be done?' It's this cooperative attitude, they are just doing all these things without us telling them.

Emma: It's by modelling, it doesn't need to be by instructing.

Carys: I guess that even if people aren't co-op members - and I'm a volunteer but not a co-op member - it's the culture that it creates. A flat culture, an inclusive culture. And that then affects how you deal with everyone. Also I think one of the other big benefits of cooperative work is that everyone seems to be happier!

Emma: Yeah, we've been doing this for two years now and people are happy and people come to meetings every month. It's not a chore.

Tania: People ask me, 'What do you do about people who don't pull their weight?' And I'm like, 'Well, that doesn't happen'.

Fionn: We pre-empt that, because we're considerate and caring about what that means to pull weight. It's voluntary participation as well, because I think we are all equally, in very different ways, passionate about VOY. So we want to be here. I want to do my work, I want to do well, I want to consider others, and that's because of the culture. Is it something about how these principles work, and cooperative decision making?

Julia: And caring as well. Because young people, if they feel heard and respected and seen and cared for, that does create an atmosphere. That's what's happening in the co-op with us workers and maybe that's what's being reflected with the young people as well – that we care for each other and we hear each other's needs.

Fionn: It makes you feel better to go to work, it makes you want to care for others.

Emma: But it's not a coincidence, is it? The reason why it's working is because we all needed this, wanted this, from the beginning.

Fionn: What is the spark with what we're doing? Is it about the principles as opposed to the cooperative structure? Or does the structure allow the principles?

Carys: I think for me it's also about linking it to our fourth principle, that there are certain structures that are oppressive in society. Cooperatives are not perfect, but it's a structure that is not as oppressive. This is the kind of world we want, so this is how we're going to work.

Doing grassroots youth work differently?

For the remainder of this chapter I write once more as an individual practitioner and researcher, while still of course being informed by ongoing discussions with colleagues and young people at Voice of Youth (VOY). The collectively written piece above was finalised before some of the other chapters were completed; now as I come to the end of my study I have the chance to reflect on how the VOY dialogues relate to the key themes in my research. In doing so I want to acknowledge the previous section as a standalone piece of writing in its own right; in other words I prefer not to treat it as 'data' in the same way as if it was a group interview. What I do want to do is to draw out some of what is interesting about VOY in the context of this research and how it contributes to understandings of grassroots youth work in a changing policy context.

Before doing so it is important that I acknowledge once again that I am writing here about an organisation that I am practically, politically and emotionally invested in. My identity as an 'insider researcher' has hardly been absent from the previous chapters; I discussed some of the dilemmas in Chapter 2, and throughout the thesis have included practice reflections, attempting to make a virtue of my involvement in the field while acknowledging the challenges involved. However, there is a different quality to writing about VOY as an organisation that I have been part of setting up; about colleagues who are my friends and (in some cases) young people I have worked with since they were children; about youth work that is organised very close to the way I have always hoped and dreamed might be possible. I am immensely proud to be involved in VOY, even on our most difficult days. In this circumstance it is questionable how critical I can truly be about this organisation; readers will be able to make up their own mind on the basis of the partial perspective I am able to present.

Throughout this thesis I have explored some of the barriers faced by grassroots workers in the context of dominant neoliberal policy. Youth workers are subject to marketised, performative and surveillant policy that is enacted in a variety of local areas, but their experience of this policy can be very different. This depends at least partly on the managerial style in their organisations. While no firm conclusions can be drawn from the small numbers of workers involved in this study, it seems that volunteers and part-timers identify some senior managers as supportive and willing to listen – particularly those with substantial youth work experience themselves – while others are seen as authoritarian and lacking in understanding of grassroots practice. Even the most democratically inclined managers have limited room for manoeuvre in the new policy contexts: they have little time or space for involvement in face-to-face practice, and are themselves managed according to inflexible target- and finance-based criteria (Davies & Merton, 2009; 2010; Spence & Devanney, 2006).

In this context, Voice of Youth provides an interesting and counter-hegemonic perspective on the everyday experiences of grassroots youth workers. Grassroots workers are the creators of this organisation alongside the young people they work with; unlike the part-timers and volunteers in most organisations they do not have managers, and all of them are at the centre of both practice and decision making. VOY's formal structure as a workers' co-operative gives each worker an equal stake in decisions through co-operative meetings, and its participative structure is reinforced by the absence of hierarchical management and an equal hourly pay rate (Radical Routes, 2012). This means that VOY's workers are in a different relation to their work than would be the case if they were formally employed and managed, or if they were casual sessional workers. The workers clearly feel that the flat structure feeds through to the way they work with young people: 'It's the culture that it creates. A flat culture, an inclusive culture. And that then affects how you deal with everyone' (Carys).

VOY's flat structure challenges but does not remove informal hierarchies or power imbalances that might be reinforced by societal and structural inequalities including those relating to gender, race, age, experience, class, sexuality and dis/ability. Inequalities in the wider world are likely to affect relations in any group and this is recognised by VOY's fourth principle, which aims to 'promote equality and challenge

oppressive structures... including in our own organisation'. This includes being aware of and tacking social inequalities and valuing local knowledge and understanding. Local young people (including Keishaun and Anna-Nina in the dialogues, above) are at the heart of VOY. Keishaun suggests that his experience as a local young person is valued: 'my colleagues will understand where my point of view is coming from if they can't see it for themselves, because my background is growing up in the area and I'm closer to the young people's age'.

Of course, it is likely that there will be times when some workers and volunteers feel their perspective is not valued or heard. If VOY is to continue to challenge internal hierarchies and inequalities, this will be an ongoing project; as Julia said, 'I think it's something that we're constantly questioning and looking at in the way that we work as colleagues'. It might be particularly difficult for a worker to raise concerns in an environment where we are all assumed to share many values and principles, and VOY will need to think about how to welcome internal conflict and dialogue while keeping its radical edge. In addition, VOY will need to make deliberate efforts in its aim to maintain a diverse team; at present the group of workers is diverse in terms of gender, 'race', class, age and sexuality, and less so in terms of dis/ability; however, it cannot afford to be complacent in assuming diversity will ‘naturally’ occur. A small working group is currently meeting to think more deeply about internal equality issues, and there are plans to bring in 'critical friends' as trainers or facilitators to help the group address existing and potential inequalities.

If VOY was motivated by a positive vision of putting equality and worker participation at its heart, it was also formed to resist and struggle against what its workers feel are inappropriate funding mechanisms. Its unwillingness to accept funding that does not accord with its principles sets it apart from most mainstream voluntary and non-profit youth organisations, which understandably put financial sustainability at the forefront of their decisions. Throughout this thesis, workers speak of ways in which they are affected by funding that requires them to work towards targets that constrain their work and change their identities as workers. Being willing to turn down funding, VOY is freer of restrictions than most other youth organisations; although no organisation that is registered and accepts funding can ever entirely escape policy constraints (Incite, 2007).

Young people in VOY can choose whether and how to get involved rather than being required to attend, their details are not shared with other organisations, they are fully involved in decisions, they are encouraged and supported to become volunteers and workers themselves from age 16, and they are rarely – if ever – asked to do something 'just for the paperwork'. VOY's youth workers position themselves on young people's side, supporting them (for example) in their campaign for young people's rights in school (Mouth That Roars & Voice of Youth, 2013).

The clearest disadvantage of VOY's principled stance is its lack of sustainable funding to employ workers on regular significant contracts. At the time of writing, co-operative members are paid part-time wages, most of us only during school holidays and special projects. VOY provides a main (tiny) income for some of its workers and a supplementary income for others; the small amount of paid work available means that everybody has to sustain themselves in other ways, for example through other youth work jobs, casual work, student loans and grants, family support, benefits and tax credits. The frustration of this is apparent on occasion in the dialogues above, where workers express the hope that they can 'maybe pay ourselves eventually!' VOY's rejection of unsuitable funding is a positive decision, though, that demonstrates a desire to sustain ethical relationships with young people rather than working for financial reward. Having a genuine involvement in creating our own working conditions can compensate to some extent for lower pay and uncertain employment conditions (McGregor & Mills 2014). More cynically, however, it could also be seen as a form of self-exploitation:

> Co-ops can struggle to pay their workers a sustainable wage, and members run the risk of replacing exploitation by a boss with a mentality of self-exploitation. In addition, surviving in a capitalist market whilst sticking by our ethical and political beliefs can be a real struggle, not just economically but also personally. Sometimes difficult compromises have to be made, and this can be emotionally challenging. (Radical Routes, 2012, p.14)

Self-exploitation and over-work can be a particular danger for those organisations (like VOY) that organise themselves democratically while working in a field that seems to require almost endless amounts of passion, care, commitment, patience and love. This resonates with the dilemmas around passion and emotional labour discussed in Chapter 4. The VOY workers at times discuss their caring and passionate commitment, which

they suggest is fuelled by being part of a co-operative:

> I think we are all equally, in very different ways, passionate about VOY. So we want to be here. I want to do my work, I want to do well, I want to consider others, and that's because of the culture. (Fionn)
>
> Sometimes it is really long! But it's interesting. It takes a while because we all have to meet and then we all have to make decisions together. But it's better, I think, because we all know what we're doing and we've all chosen to do it. We've all said what we wanted to do and we've made it into one. (Anna-Nina)
>
> Young people, if they feel heard and respected and seen and cared for, that does create an atmosphere. That's what's happening in the co-op with us workers and maybe that's what's being reflected with the young people as well – that we care for each other and we hear each other's needs. (Julia)

The passion and caring expressed by VOY members echoes the language used by grassroots workers from a variety of organisations in Chapter 4. It also emphasises caring and consideration between workers, which then feeds back into passion and care for young people and for youth work itself. Emotional satisfaction is frequently expressed at VOY meetings; and yet, members regularly share that we feel tired, over-loaded and overwhelmed. Inevitably it is difficult to sustain any radical organisation, particularly when it is dependent on the voluntary labour of a small number of people (see Sheridan-Rabideau, 2008). Developing a wider network of support might mitigate some of the pressures involved in running our own organisation while retaining its positive aspects, and this is something we hope to work towards – when we have the time and energy!

Idealistic youth work as passionate resistance

How can radical organisations contribute to the further development of passionate grassroots youth work that resists market-orientated and managerial policy regimes? Idealistic groups such as Voice of Youth can be seen as both protest and experiment, formed in opposition to dominant policy while also trying out alternative approaches. This is expressed by Carys in her closing remark in the VOY dialogues: 'This is the kind of world we want, so this is how we're going to work'. When as youth workers and young people we started meeting about setting up a new organisation, we first spent time envisioning an organisation that worked outside of hierarchical styles of

management, and that prioritised informal, open access and person-centred youth work over income or growth. By putting these ideas into practice over the last three years we have been attempting to work against the status quo and for a more equal and grassroots approach to youth work.

Voice of Youth is not alone as a youth project attempting to practice alternatively (see Batsleer, 2013a; Batsleer & Hughes, 2013; Davies, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 3, the difficult funding environment seems paradoxically to open up spaces for new organisations that are experimenting with different ways of working, perhaps because finance is no longer directed preferentially at local authorities and registered charities, and perhaps because in an era of drastic cuts there is 'little to lose' from trying something different. Several workers in this study have either set up their own organisations very recently, or are hoping to do so in the near future. Sarah's business has young people on the board and staff, and young people are supported to campaign on local issues such as housing. Zandra works for a small business with a flexible, affectionate and human approach to working with young people, despite onerous targets and a payment-by-results contract. Billie's organisation was set up in a neighbourhood with a historic lack of youth provision and attempts to work in cooperation rather than competition with other local youth providers. Keiron and Diana are meeting a business advisor about their ideas, hoping to 'show that there can be a really good organisation there that really cares about young people' (Keiron). All of these small new organisations experience significant challenges, particularly in obtaining sufficient income to employ workers on a fair wage, but all are enactments of hope.

Radical, idealistic and alternative youth work can be seen as a form of prefigurative politics (Boggs, 1977; Rowbotham, 1979; Breines, 1989; Batsleer, 2013a); in other words, 'becoming the change we wish to see – in all the small details of our lives' (B'Hahn, 2001, p. 9). The term 'prefigurative' was first coined by Carl Boggs (1977) who described this tradition as the rejection of all forms of domination and 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (p.2). Prefiguration contrasts with mainstream revolutionary and political struggles that can often unintentionally recreate the oppressive structures they are trying to

replace (Rojas, 2007, p.200). The thinking behind prefigurative politics is both visionary and practical, and involves protest as well as positivity; the future is re-imagined in opposition to the problems of the present, and elements of a preferred future are put into practice. Groups have adopted this stance for tactical as well as principled reasons: 'if the new society were to be characterised by participatory democracy, anti-authoritarianism and liberation, the political means of achieving these goals had to be consonant' (Breines, 1989, p.53).

Throughout history, radical groups have resisted by working in a way that aligns with the changes they are fighting for. During the English Civil War in the seventeenth century, the Diggers attempted to live non-hierarchically on common land in harmony with nature and in defiance of wealthy and powerful landowners (Hill, 1972). In the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, villagers organised themselves according to democratic anarchist principles while fighting fascists (Bookchin, 2001). When the Black Panthers worked towards self-determination in the USA in the 1960s, they organised neighbourhood health and education programmes including free breakfasts for children (Newton, 1974). Women who organised against sexism in the 1970s formed consciousness raising groups and rape crisis centres (Rowbotham, 1979). Prefigurative politics remains active and relevant today; for example, oppositional movements such as 'Occupy' make decisions inclusively through discussion and consensus rather than having leaders, hierarchies and predefined demands (Graeber, 2004; 2013).

Prefiguration does not mean 'escaping' from the world of which organisations and workers are necessarily part; even the most radical youth organisations will always be implicated in and reliant on the oppressive power relations they oppose. In the USA, the term 'non-profit industrial complex' is used in recognition of the financial and structural power of philanthropic foundations (Incite!, 2007; Kwon, 2013). Poststructuralist theory points out that resistance can never take place outside of existing unequal power regimes (Butler in Olson & Worsham, 2000; Foucault, 1978), and Marxist and anarchist thinkers would add that subversive ideas have a tendency to be recuperated or incorporated back into mainstream profit-driven governance (Debord, 1977). Setting up idealistic and radical youth organisations is a more valuable form of protest when it emphasises the need for workers to think about how they perpetrate as well as struggle

against inequality and oppression.

Breines (1989) describes prefigurative politics as 'attractive, inspiring, difficult, utopian' (p.49), and acknowledges the emotions of disappointment and despair that arose in movements she studied when their attempts to do things differently did not always seem to work. The other side to passion can sometimes be exhaustion and burn-out, particularly when things are not going well. In their book *Democratic Schools*, Apple and Beane (1999, p.121) point out that educational work is exhausting anyway, and that the teachers involved in democratic schools have, at least, 'chosen to be exhausted as a result of something worthwhile'. This is true in many ways, but what about when an experiment does not feel worthwhile at that moment, or does not seem to be working? There is a political element to Breines' point; it can be particularly emotionally demanding to work on politically radical projects because of the risk that any 'failure' might be taken as evidence that there was, after all, no alternative.

We started VOY with few expectations, and now that the co-operative is there we hope to maintain it for young people and for ourselves, and also to 'prove' to ourselves and others that it is possible to work without managers, without hierarchy, and without being funding-led. We do not aim for 'success' according to business-oriented measures such as income, growth or 'brand recognition'; instead, we hope that we do not become dogmatic or closed-minded, that we care for each other and for the young people we work with, and that our politics and principles remain at the centre of our work rather than becoming diluted or compromised. In the words of the Zapatista activist, Marcos: 'The nightmare would be that after all this, we would end up the same' (El Kilombo Intergalactico, 2007, p.53).

Conclusion: Creating real utopias

Like the other stories of resistance and subversion I have told in this thesis, Voice of Youth's story challenges any argument that austerity, privatisation and marketization have entirely won out in the youth work field. Even if VOY turns out to be short-lived, it provides a small story of hope in difficult times. As Kofman and Lebas (1996, p.21) argue, 'To think about alternative possibilities, we need utopias'. By referring to the

word 'utopia' I do not mean to suggest that VOY or other idealistic organisations are perfect, but neither do I think that the idea of utopia needs to mean something that is unrealistic or out of reach. I am thinking of something akin to Wright's (2010) concept of ‘real utopias':

> It would be undesirable, I think, for the task of constructing an image of utopia, as we are doing, to be seen as an attempt to find definitive institutional answers to various problems. We can perhaps determine what kinds of social institutions negate our goals and which kind of institutions seem to at least move towards those goals, but it would be impossible to come up with detailed plans of actual institutions which would fully embody all of our ideals. Our real task is to try to think of institutions which themselves are capable of dynamic change, of responding to the needs of the people and evolving accordingly, rather than of institutions which are so perfect that they need no further change. (p.3)

'Real utopias’, argues Wright, are neither reformist nor abstract; they are about 'a clear elaboration of workable institutional principles that could inform emancipatory alternatives to the existing world' (p.4). This kind of utopian thinking does not wait until circumstances are perfect. Real utopianism is about taking action now, even or especially when the situation is particularly desperate. In a discussion of socially just education policy, Gandin and Apple (2012, p.16) reproduce the following quote from a lecture by Zizek:

> True utopia emerges when there are no ways to resolve the situation within the coordinates of the possible and, out of the pure urge to survive, you have to invent a new space. Utopia is not a free imagination: utopia is a matter of innermost urgency: you are forced to imagine something else as the only way out.

Voice of Youth was born out of a hostile environment for critical and democratic youth work. It was inspired by ‘the pure urge to survive’, by the threatened closure of neighbourhood youth projects, by the intolerability of existing conditions, and by the radical youth and activist organisations that some of its members had been involved in or heard about. Perhaps VOY will inspire others in its turn. Apple and Beane (1999, p.xvii) write that educators, activists and policy makers 'are constantly looking for ways that enable them to put their most deeply felt democratic ideals into practice'. VOY is not intended to be an 'ideal' model to be copied, and yet it provides ideas and experiences as resources for others who want to do things differently in their own contexts. My colleagues and I want to tell others about our experiences with VOY partly because of the paucity of alternative stories:

> Whilst sociological work in education had been extremely effective in identifying social injustice in education, and in analysing the way in which education systems reproduce inequality, it had been less good at proposing alternative models. (Francis & Mills, 2012, p.3)

Francis and Mills (2012) note that the few stories of this nature that *are* told tend to be small-scale projects in which researchers themselves are involved, and this chapter is an example of such a story. Because of the all-encompassing nature of neoliberalism, it could be at small local levels that alternatives are most able to be practised, and many of these may never be heard about because those involved might be too busy and tired to write them up. Researchers can sometimes have a useful role here, as critical secretaries or critical consultants (Apple & Beane, 1999; Land & King, forthcoming). Stories of organisations, however small, that try to do things differently and share their experiences can 'remind us that the most powerful meaning of democracy is formed not in glossy political rhetoric, but in the details of everyday lives' (Apple & Beane, 2012, p.120). Today, as youth work struggles to remain alive in a context of constraints, it seems particularly important to share alternative stories.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

This thesis has explored the experiences of part-time and volunteer youth workers at a time of significant change and insecurity. It has reflected on their work in relation to broad policy moves in the direction of marketisation, managerialism and surveillance, and explored their passion and resistance in the face of these changes. The thesis is written as a contribution to the practice field as well as to an academic community, and as such is offered in the spirit of providing resources for recognition, critical reflection, creative thought, collective discussion and inspiration. The conclusion draws together the evidence and arguments of the preceding chapters to revisit the central inter-related themes of policy, passion and resistance as well as providing short summaries of the key findings and implications of this research.

First I want to take a moment to reflect on my own 'passion and resistance' as a research student. My intention in studying was to take a break from complete immersion in practice; my passion at that time was for youth work, and research was one way of trying something different while building my understanding (both politically and theoretically) of what was happening to a field of work that I loved. Initially I had no intention of being involved in academia beyond this study; however, I have loved the experience so much that I now hope I can find a way of continuing to combine youth work practice and academic work. My relationship to studying is not straightforward or uncritical, though, and there are aspects of academia I do not like. In addition to its continuing vestiges of elitism, higher education is probably changing even faster than youth work in the direction of the market and managerialism (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2013). I have resisted elements of my positioning as a PhD student, particularly the dominant assumption in policy that my colleagues and I are engaged in research and its associated activities merely to enhance our individual career prospects. Like many others, I love research because of its potential to contribute to change, for the opportunity to talk and learn with others, and the freedom to think and write. As I finish writing this thesis I am naturally anxious about what other people might think of it, but my doubts are accompanied by excitement about sharing my research more widely, and thinking about what I might learn next.

This conclusion, then, is not the final word on grassroots youth work and it may not even be the final word on this research project; there are areas left to explore here, but for now it is time to draw the thesis to a close. The conclusion is in three parts. In the first I return to the key themes of the thesis - policy, passion and resistance – and think in particular about the diverse forms of resistance that youth workers engage in, bringing the varied examples from this research together under three broad and inter-related headings. The second section summarises the key findings of the research. The third is a brief discussion of its implications for practice, organisation and management, policy, and activism.

Revisiting policy, passion and resistance

This thesis focuses on the experiences of grassroots youth workers at a time when they face challenges and difficulties as a result of policy change in the direction of market values and managerialism, underpinned by neoliberal ideologies. My research contributes to growing evidence that grassroots youth work is under threat. It is increasingly difficult to make a living as a face-to-face youth worker, particularly in open access settings and in local authorities. Many of the workers in this study are living in precarious circumstances, some with very limited income indeed. The current funding and policy regime normalises market values, measurable outcomes and surveillance as well as repeated rounds of spending cuts, redundancies and organisational restructuring. These changes militate against open access work and anti-oppressive groups that are based on relationships and process, are led by young people, and have outcomes that are difficult to predict or measure.

While this thesis takes the threats seriously, its focus on grassroots youth workers' perspectives prevents its analysis from being one of relentless pessimism. The workers in this study are passionate about youth work, love working with young people, care deeply for the young people they work with, and are committed to hearing young people's perspectives. Open access youth work emerges from this study as a distinctive practice that works on young people's own terms, takes their everyday lives seriously, celebrates fun and informal learning, values the unpredictable and the non-instrumental,

and creates spaces for young people to spend time and build positive relationships with each other and with adults. Youth clubs, street-based work and anti-oppressive groups are historically and currently significant and important forms of practice, and as such they need to be defended. The love and passion felt and communicated by grassroots youth workers is demonstrative of their genuine commitment to a form of work that is highly valued by young people and yet is under serious threat.

In the face of this threat, part-timers and volunteers do not emerge from this study as powerless dupes or disengaged victims. As I have argued, policy is a process of struggle and contestation, and government priorities are not necessarily implemented in a straightforward manner at the level of practice (Ozga, 2000; Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Grassroots youth workers engage in discourse that is critical of target cultures, social control, markets and surveillance, and they take action to negotiate, challenge and resist the situations that they find themselves in. The passion of grassroots workers for their everyday work - as well as their critical and disputatious response to various policy initiatives - contributes greatly to the present and future of open access youth work that is authentic and beneficial to young people. In summary, this study is broadly pessimistic about policy while being hopeful about youth work, youth workers, and young people.

I have been particularly interested in and inspired by the everyday passion and resistance of grassroots youth workers who oppose, question or contest the dominance of market and managerial values in their work, and I have returned to this theme in various places and from different angles throughout the thesis. In Chapter 3 I discussed some of the ambivalent positions that youth workers take up – with varying levels of consent or willingness – in the youth work market. Some are involved in collective opposition to spending cuts, while in other places this kind of resistance was somewhat obstructed by organisational policies and sometimes by workers' own cynicism about the likelihood of success. Resistance was more clearly and consistently present in everyday practice, when part-timers maintained their passion for youth work even while working in incredibly difficult and precarious circumstances, and when they set up new organisations that put young people at the centre. This focus on young people was also emphasised in Chapter 4, which explored grassroots workers' love and passion for their

work. Grassroots workers demonstrated genuine care for young people and enjoyed spending time with them, going ‘the extra mile’ to keep youth centres open, create spaces where they could feel ‘at home’, and maintain warm relationships. Although workers’ passion risked leading to their exploitation and exhaustion, it also contributed to an attitude that was sceptical of or overtly opposed to commodification.

In Chapter 5 I discussed how target cultures and performance mechanisms can undermine youth workers' passion for their work. I argued that grassroots workers are struggling for authenticity: by speaking of their work in ways that challenge 'tick box' cultures; by asserting non-measurable and young person-centred outcomes for their work; by opposing particularly damaging targets or measurement systems; by engaging in 'tactical performativity', where they prove themselves as good workers and thus earn some leeway to challenge or refuse other aspects of their work; and through collective action and campaigning. Some of these themes were developed further in Chapter 6, which focused on surveillance in the practice of street-based youth work. Some workers overtly refused to engage in elements of surveillance such as working alongside the police, while in relation to electronic surveillance most were involved in both accommodation and resistance (Weitz, 2001; MacLeod, 1991). I suggested that workers might join with young people and others to question assumptions about who and what 'the street' is for, perhaps taking inspiration from political movements to re-imagine the street for the use and participation of everybody.

Chapter 7 developed this idea of rethinking what we take for granted and re-imagining our present and our future, focusing on the work of one small organisation, Voice of Youth. The workers and volunteers involved in Voice of Youth (of whom I am one) aim to create the change we want to see in the world, organising ourselves as a workers' co-operative of young people and experienced workers, and following critical youth work principles. Voice of Youth avoids funding that is not based on young people's needs or wishes, or that involves workers in systematic surveillance of young people; aims to take action alongside young people on issues affecting the communities where they work; and organises without managerial hierarchies. Small idealistic organisations can make a difference in their own communities, while also demonstrating different ways of working that might inform and inspire practitioners in other areas and settings.

Taken as a whole, this study provides evidence that grassroots youth workers can - and often do - take young people's side, challenge oppression, oppose tick-box and pathologising methodologies, and question the centrality of market logic. My closing argument is that this resistance is essential to the survival of grassroots youth work and needs to be encouraged. Even when hope seems misplaced and the future looks bleak, it is always better to live today in ways that resist domination (Anonymous, 2011). Perhaps youth workers can develop an activist spirit by sharing their experiences of resistance as they share other aspects of their practice, learning from each other as well as developing creative new forms.

In youth work and the wider world, resistance is diversifying. It does not only encompass mass collective forms of action such as large demonstrations and occupations; it also includes more modest forms of action that are sometimes referred to as everyday or 'micro' resistances (Weitz, 2001; Barinaga, 2013; Seymour, 2006; Thomas & Davies, 2005a; 2005b; Ball, 2013). My aim here is not to privilege everyday action over more ambitious and collective forms of activism (Collinson, 2005), but to keep an open mind about how and where change might come about. To do this, it is vital to acknowledge and explore everyday forms of activism where people use the tools at their disposal to speak or act for what they believe to be right and against what they see as wrong. It could be that 'these everyday, apparently trivial, individual acts of resistance offer the potential to spark social change and, in the long run, to shift the balance of power between social groups' (Weitz, 2001, p.670).

This research shows that everyday resistance takes diverse forms in grassroots youth work. Workers and volunteers are resisting when they refuse to accept certain conditions of funding, criticise target-driven work, value love and care over profit, and set up alternative organisations. At times they challenge the status quo and at other times they accommodate themselves to it (Weitz, 2001). Their resistance is fluid, diverse and creative. Inevitably it can also be dispersed and inconsistent, often taking place at a small scale on a local level, and not necessarily leading to change. Despite its limitations, however, everyday activism by grassroots youth workers emerges from this research as a key element in keeping alive open access and informal approaches to

youth work.

What I want to do here is ‘map’ the resistance that grassroots youth workers are engaged in, with the aim of presenting workers' actual practices of resistance back to them (and to others) as resources for sharing, learning, adapting and developing, in different places and in diverse ways. In what follows I have conceptualised resistance under three headings:

- Counter-discourses
- Refusals and rebellion
- Creating alternatives

The point here is not to create artificial boundaries between different kinds of action, or to replace other useful models or understandings, but rather to provide one way to understand the inter-related kinds of resistance that grassroots workers already engage in. These headings are based on practices discussed in this study, and the examples are provided here as ideas and inspiration for creative reinterpretation and transformation, and to encourage reflective, confident and active forms of dissent (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013).

Developing counter-discourses

Counter-discourses are ways of speaking, thinking and acting that go against what is taken for granted and challenge the idea that 'there is no alternative' (Woolford & Curran, 2013). My research demonstrates that grassroots youth workers employ counter-discourses in various contexts and for different purposes. They are using counter-discourses when they speak about their love and passion for their work and emphasise their relationships with young people over financial reward. They also use counter-discourses when they express doubt, uncertainty and overt critique over some aspects of their work: when they are critical of target cultures, ‘tick box’ and ‘bums on seats’ approaches, overly bureaucratic methodologies, involvement in surveillance and policing, authoritarian management, and pathologising ways of viewing young people. By speaking against oppressive policy regimes and in favour of care, cooperation and relationship, they are ‘proceeding from a different field of judgement' (Lipman, 2013,

p.13) and putting human relationships before profit.

Emotional engagement in youth work might be seen as unremarkable, perhaps apolitical or even conformist in a caring profession. Overt critique might be dismissed as part of the usual day-to-day complaint that tends to exist in organisations. I would suggest, however, that in a policy environment where returns on investment are 'what counts', expressions of emotional commitment, doubt, uncertainty and critique can constitute an alternative discourse. Speaking about care rather than money, and cooperation rather than competition, goes some way towards rejecting or at least questioning dominant neoliberal values. It is a way of unsettling ourselves and others (Ball, 2013, p.147), and such unsettling might contribute to the survival of critical grassroots youth work.

In developing counter-discourses, workers have much to learn from feminist, black and anti-colonial struggles. Hill Collins (1986, 1990) and bell hooks (1984) write that black women have made creative use of their marginal status and adopted alternative discourses that are about self-definition and self-validation. Thiong'o (1986) argues for African writers to 'decolonise the mind' by using their own languages in preference to the English of their colonisers. There are parallels with part-time and volunteer youth workers, who are marginalised in their organisations and yet articulate worries and concerns, questioning and often rejecting the language of targets, outcomes and profit. Using non-dominant language can reinforce cultures that work against the grain of dominant power (Thiong'o, 1986) and can interrupt institutional definitions and narratives (Langhout, 2005). These are some of the ways in which youth workers in this research have engaged in counter-discourses:

- Putting young people's experiences, feelings and opinions above the meeting of targets.
- Telling managers and funders that there are things about youth work that cannot easily be measured or even explained.
- Sharing dilemmas with young people and discussing the dominance of capital and markets in our society.
- Talking about young people as young people, rather than using pathologising labels.

- Meeting with others (informally, on university courses, online, and as part of groups such as In Defence of Youth Work and Feminist Webs) to reflect on the current conditions of their practice and of young people's lives.

Despite the importance of these actions, resistance through discourse can be difficult. Using one's voice is particularly problematic for marginalised groups as it relies on being located where it is possible to speak and be heard (Spivak, 1988). Part-time workers may have few arenas where they are listened to, and there is a reasonable fear about speaking out when jobs and whole organisations are at risk (Collinson, 2005). Many are in vulnerable positions, living on incredibly low incomes and with little or no job security, and may decide to keep their critique to themselves or only share it with trusted allies. Despite this, it has been suggested that youth workers could be more courageous and engage more readily in questioning:

> Amidst the tension and strain in the workplace there's often more space to question than we allow. It becomes easy to censor ourselves before the official censor even appears... it is possible to say, 'here are the figures for this particular project in percentiles. The data is easy on the eye and ear, but in truth it tells us less than we used to garner from the project reports, our meetings with workers and young people in the past'. (Taylor and Taylor, 2013, p.13)

Using counter-discourses 'upwards' in the direction of managers, funders and politicians is a risky strategy, and yet many of the workers in this research do just this, even despite their insecure employment conditions. Some of their complaints are ignored while others change local policy and practice. Inevitably, it will often be difficult to assess the impact of thinking and speaking differently, but this does not mean that counter-discourses are ineffective. Developing counter-discourses is about 'the need to constantly interrupt oneself, to make ethico-political choices, to remain alert to the dangers which lurk in the everyday... and to question the limits of what we say and how we act' (Ball 2013, p.149). In trying to speak differently we will not always 'get it right'; this is inevitable, and uncertainty itself can be a counter-discourse, a challenge to the dominant insistence on proof and measurement.

Refusals and rebellion

While counter-discourses are widespread amongst grassroots youth workers, large-scale collective actions such as strikes and demonstrations seem to be less common. Only one interviewee in this research was involved in long-running industrial action against cuts and closures in her youth service, and it is noteworthy that she felt her status as a volunteer gave her more freedom to be involved:

> Tania: So what do you think's the difference between being a volunteer youth worker or being a paid worker, if any difference?
> Louise: I do think that maybe I don't feel […] as restricted. And I probably am and I should still follow the rules, whether I'm paid or not. But in my head I think, well I don't have a contract and you're not paying me, so really I could possibly bend the rules and it doesn't really matter. And at the moment there are a lot of things people are saying you shouldn't do, like protesting for example, 'you shouldn't do this because you're a council employee'. And therefore they have been told if they are caught protesting in work time […] then it can be classed as a disciplinary.
> Tania: What's that, protesting about the cuts?
> Louise: About the cuts, yeah. So they've been told not to. They've also been told not to tell the young people […] about what's happening. Not get them involved in any of the protest […] When they had the big council meeting […] none of the employees went because, they stood outside but none of them went in because they weren't allowed to […] whereas I was able to go in.

This account suggests some of the barriers for paid workers in engaging in overt political action. Part-timers worry that getting involved in strikes or protests could put them at personal risk, and they are concerned that others might not join in because of the fear of being sacked. Through my involvement with In Defence of Youth Work I have repeatedly heard workers expressing fear that their employer might find out they had been to one of our meetings or attended a conference workshop on radical youth work. It is unclear whether these fears are well-founded, but such perceptions are widespread.

However, grassroots youth workers *do* have ways to be rebellious in their workplaces. Although most of the workers involved in this study might not see themselves as politically active and few are affiliated to campaign groups or unions, nearly all have at some time made an active decision not to follow a rule. For example, it was common amongst street-based youth workers to avoid or refuse requirements to ask every young

person to fill out a registration form (see Chapter 6). Their street-level rebellions were small-scale but important, and the widespread nature of these refusals led indirectly to a change in one market leading database system where anonymous contacts can now be recorded. Such change is hardly revolutionary; most local authority funded detached workers are still pressured to meet targets for 'named' contacts even if they are also able to record anonymous ones, and nearly all remain involved in the tracking of young people through databases. Nevertheless, this small but important reform suggests that refusal and rule breaking, even when it is decentralised and uncoordinated, can lead to change.

Other rebellion and rule-breaking was clearly apparent in the research. Examples include:

- Leaving a job or giving up a piece of work because of disagreements with managers or objection to a requirement.
- Reluctance to be promoted or become managers, or to apply for jobs that take them away from face-to-face work or require extensive bureaucracy.
- Refusal to stop working with a young person who has moved out of the funding catchment area or targeted category.
- Speaking out at meetings in opposition to requirements that are unlikely to work on the ground.
- Refusal to prioritise administrative work and meetings over face-to-face work.
- Insistence on young people's centrality to decision-making.
- Allowing young people to hug them when this is advised against in employer protocols.
- Refusing to work alongside the police.
- Refusing to 'out' young people by entering the details of LGBT youth group members on local government databases.

While some in the field express regret that the youth workforce 'inclines to debate and disputation' (Wylie, 2004, p.27), most workers in my study celebrated their rebellious nature. Laura argued that, 'to be a good youth worker we need to break the rules'. Rachel said, 'There's not many wallflowers. You can't be, can you? It wouldn't work.

Lots of kind of feisty spirits but that's fine, that's good.' Louise saw youth workers as 'free spirits' who 'don't like laws and rules'. Workers' rebellion was, itself, often a matter for critical reflection, and they made thoughtful and tactical decisions about where to conform and where to rebel, or where to resist and where to accommodate to the status quo (Weitz, 2001). This can be seen in Chapter 5, for example, where Lucy discusses how she and her colleagues generally proved to be 'easy, good employees' and that this gave them some leeway to take a principled stance on issues they thought particularly important.

While some may doubt the political effectiveness of dispersed and isolated acts of rebellion such as those considered here, I argue that they maintain and develop an activist spirit (Avis, 2005; Sachs, 2000) and that this can make a real difference. It is difficult to know in advance what forms of protest will make a lasting transformation, so it is important to keep open the idea and the possibility of change and to trouble the boundaries of present norms by undermining and subverting their restrictions.

Creating alternatives

The creation of alternatives is sometimes referred to as 'being the change you want to see in the world' or prefigurative politics (Breines, 1989; see also Chapter 7 in this thesis). My research shows that grassroots youth workers are engaged in setting up alternative organisations as well as working alternatively within existing organisations. This is a process of praxis: of understanding our situation, thinking about how things could be different, putting those thoughts into practice, and reflecting on our actions (Freire, 1988). This form of resistance can encompass both ambitious new organisations and small-scale innovations. Youth workers in this research engaged in creating alternatives in a variety of ways:

- Forming a non-hierarchical youth workers' co-operative based on principles of youth work and co-operation.
- Starting a youth work 'business' that questions and rejects market-oriented values and supports young people in campaigning.
- Opening up a youth centre to young people at all times when workers are available, rather than only at set times of the evening.

- Using stories – in all of their ambiguity and uncertainty - to evaluate and describe youth work rather than relying on statistical outcomes (IDYW, 2011).
- Claiming spaces for open access, anti-oppressive and critical work with young people.

While creating alternatives sounds positive and refusal sounds negative and reactive, this is a false dichotomy. Questioning and perhaps rejecting what we have come to see as normal might be necessary for the reinvention of our assumed ways of working, and the creation of positive alternatives depends first on political engagement and critique. McGimpsey (2013, p.301-2) writes powerfully in relation to youth workers in co-operative organisations who reject targeted youth work and managerialist technologies:

> The Co-op[18] disconnects from the (monetary and subjective) machinery of the reproduction of injurious and economically-instrumentalist representations of young people to produce a seemingly blank space 'to be themselves'... Following this trajectory, and disconnecting from the machinery of youth service production to do so, is simultaneously a connecting, productive movement by which this group of workers are forming and occupying a different territory largely separate from the new youth service assemblage... Youth work is allowed to find new meanings as youth worker subjects try 'to not limit ourselves'.

Disconnections and connections operate here not as a binary but as interdependent; refusals interact with new ideas to create alternatives. This seems to resonate with Butler and Athanasiou (2013, p.xi) when they think about:

> … how to become dispossessed of the sovereign self and enter into forms of collectivity that oppose forms of dispossession that systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice.

This seemingly circular argument is useful, I think, for youth workers: there are norms that we might need to rebel against, disconnect from or dispossess ourselves of, and our refusals might help us to reclaim, reconnect or repossess alternative forms of living, working and organising. What is important here is a valuing of the collective rather than the 'sovereign self', and a productive and optimistic rejection of norms in order to claim new ways of working – or simply freer spaces that allow more scope for young people to create as they wish. This understanding helps to reconcile the times when youth workers want to fight what they believe is wrong, and when they want to celebrate what

18 The pseudonym for one of McGimpsey's research sites.

is good about youth work. Imagination for positive alternatives can come from a variety of sources: activist movements of the past and present; struggles over identity, equality, freedom and recognition; alternative organisational forms such as collectives, communes and co-operatives; radical and alternative forms of youth work, community work, social work and education; art, music, dance and fiction; and critical theory and research. It can also come from the history, practice and theory of youth work itself, particularly in its radical, experimental and anti-oppressive forms. Stories and experiences from different places and times and from inside as well as outside youth work can spark discussions between colleagues, young people, allies and wider communities. In the creative process of re-imagining what and how our work might be (and we may or may not always name this as 'youth work') we can try out some of our ideas and learn more about the reality of alternatives through a process of trial and error, discussion and critical reflection.

I have given space in Chapter 7 (and to a lesser extent in Chapter 3) to discussion of the potential for and dilemmas of creating new idealistic organisations. There were also examples in my research where workers re-imagined and re-invented youth work within mainstream local authority and voluntary sector organisations. Alan, whose work is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, works for a local authority and is under the same pressures as others to meet bureaucratic requirements and inappropriate targets. However, he acts consciously to reject the dominant managerial cultures of youth work. He spends as little time as possible on administration, insists on opening the youth centre to young people whenever he is there rather than only during opening times, and he tries to develop responsive and sensitive systems for dealing with challenging behaviour rather than enforcing inflexible punitive policies.

While Alan provides perhaps the clearest example of working alternatively within a mainstream organisation, other workers also create spaces to practice differently. Louise challenges restrictive time frames despite a culture of 'getting things done', and I described in Chapter 4 how she worked for long periods with one young woman who needed intense support. Colleagues Laura, Bridget and Lucy insist on involving young people in decisions about funding, targets and whether to work with the police; by doing so they also assert their voices as part-timers despite working in a typically hierarchical

organisation (see Chapters 5 and 6). These workers were engaged in processes of creating autonomous spaces and a critical use of time within established settings where they rejected cultures that were overly instrumental and controlling (Colley et al, 2012).

Key findings

This thesis has discussed in detail the complex blend of 'passion and resistance' involved in being a grassroots youth worker in a changing policy context, and any summary of 'key findings' is likely to gloss over some of the complexities and subtleties of the research as a whole. Nevertheless, summaries can be useful to the many people who have neither time nor inclination to read entire theses (even if they have access to them) as well as to researchers, practitioners, students and activists who read widely and yet need to be focused and selective. I hope the following six key findings can form a basis for discussion and debate amongst practitioners and others.

1. ***Open access grassroots youth work is under threat, but surviving.***

It is already well established that significant spending cuts in local and central government have disproportionately affected grassroots youth work: both directly through closures and service reduction, and indirectly through the demise of local authority youth services that previously provided structure, support, training and partnership alongside their direct services. Valued organisations and infrastructure have been lost to local young people and communities, and it is a questionable to many youth workers whether open access youth work is currently a viable career option. However, this research shows that grassroots youth work survives, even in an insecure and difficult context. Some local authorities have maintained their youth clubs, street based projects and anti-oppressive groups against the odds; some voluntary sector organisations continue to prioritise open access youth projects; and new critical and principled organisations are starting up. It is inaccurate to claim that open access youth work has already been lost, or that its loss is inevitable, and this does a disservice to those who are struggling to keep it alive. Nevertheless, the scale of the threat is significant, and an active and continuing defence of open access and anti-oppressive youth work is of vital importance at the current time.

2. ***Grassroots youth workers are critical of the dominance of market values, target cultures and top-down management which get in the way of their work.***

While cuts have been at the forefront of many hearts and minds in recent years, they are symptomatic of longer term trends towards the marketisation of youth work, the embedding of managerialism, and the divergence of management and grassroots practice. Committed workers speak consistently about certain aspects of their work and of policy that get in the way of their ability to build positive professional relationships with young people. In particular they are concerned about 'tick box' monitoring and 'bums on seats' approaches, in which young people seem to be reduced to numbers and required to meet pre-defined outcomes. Workers are also critical of top-down management systems where senior managers do not seem to listen to frontline staff or involve them in decisions; this is particularly problematic when managers have little experience or understanding of face-to-face work, a situation that is increasingly common. Part-timers and volunteers are worried that their experienced colleagues spend too much time in the office, and are concerned about their own futures in youth work if promotion means being distanced from face-to-face practice.

3. ***Grassroots youth work involves significant emotional labour; part-timers and volunteers are passionate about their work, and yet vulnerable to emotional damage.***

The grassroots youth workers in this research expressed love and passion for their work without prompting, and emphasised their care for young people and enjoyment in spending time with them. This emotional engagement creates the possibility of genuine positive relationships which are greatly valued by young people. These relationships are not predicated on profit or measurable outcomes, and for workers they mitigate some of the more challenging aspects of their role. Youth workers, whether paid or voluntary, are often prepared to 'go the extra mile' without material reward, working long unpaid hours and tolerating difficult working conditions. Such commitment might make for good youth work but can be exhausting, and can also leave them vulnerable to exploitation. Because of their deep emotional engagement in their work, grassroots youth workers might be particularly vulnerable to negative feelings; however, they generally experience their passion for youth work as a joy and a source of strength.

4. ***Part-time and volunteer youth workers tend to be marginalised in their workplaces and inadequately involved in decisions which affect their work.***

Part-timers and volunteers are increasingly relied upon as the main providers of open access youth work; however, they are often marginalised from the decisions made about their work. Sometimes this marginalisation is structural such as when they are excluded from staff meetings, not funded for training, and unable to access organisational email or internet facilities. All too often they feel that their views and experience are not respected. In the case of paid part-timers who rely on youth work for their main or only income, their marginalisation is exacerbated by precarious working conditions. Increasing numbers are employed through agencies, on zero hour contracts or on a 'self-employed' basis and these workers have very little job security. Many engage in a variety of roles to make ends meet, taking any extra hours offered to them and unable to rely on a regular income. Often the lines between paid and voluntary work are blurred. Sometimes workers are misled about whether they will be paid, and if they work for small businesses on 'payment by results' contracts they might not know whether they will be paid at the end of the month. This chronic insecurity adds to their sense of marginalisation. If grassroots youth work is to continue to survive and thrive, it is vital to listen to grassroots workers, including volunteers, and to value their work. If it is possible to provide permanent contracts and reasonable pay for senior staff, it should be possible to do the same for face-to-face workers.

5. ***Grassroots youth workers engage in a variety of forms of resistance which contribute to the survival of critical and anti-oppressive practice.***

Grassroots workers assert the need for informal, authentic and relationship based work with young people. As a result, most are critical of aspects of managerialism and market-oriented policy in their workplaces such as targets that seem inappropriate or meaningless, negative labelling of young people, cuts and inadequate resources, and practices that are akin to more formal services such as schools and social work. For many, their critique is based on their own experiences and they are not always sure how their local situation is affected by wider policy. Others are involved in organised workplace struggle such as strikes and trade union organising, or engaged in looser networks such as In Defence of Youth Work, Feminist Webs or the Federation for

Detached Youth Work. Frequently, grassroots workers are engaged in everyday forms of resistance against aspects of their work they disagree with. This everyday resistance could be vital to the survival and re-imagining of critical grassroots open access youth work.

6. ***Alternatives are possible!***

This research shows that it is possible to organise youth work in alternative ways: for example, working co-operatively rather than competitively; using qualitative forms of evaluation rather than formal measurable outcomes; valuing passion and fun rather than profit; working on young people's terms rather than from adult-defined agendas; challenging discrimination and labelling rather than contributing to it; and involving part-timers and volunteers in decisions rather than excluding or marginalising them. Some grassroots youth workers have set up their own small organisations to put alternative principles into practice. Others contribute to existing organisations that have been working for some time in ways that are critical of the status quo. Even workers who are based in mainstream organisations can carve out spaces for autonomous practice and engage in discourses of love and care that challenge the dominance of marketised and managerial systems. These organisations and workers are putting critical grassroots youth work into practice.

Implications of the research

This thesis is written in the spirit of engagement with youth workers as well as with researchers, educators, and anyone else who has an interest or involvement in youth work. Its themes may also resonate with practitioners in related fields such as education, social work, careers and youth offending work. While I hope the research will be useful, its usefulness might not always be direct, transparent, obvious or easily observable. Just as policy is interpreted and enacted in various ways, so research will be received differently by those who come across it. I hope that readers might *make use* of this research alongside other recent empirical studies of youth work that have complementary findings (Coburn, 2012; McGimpsey, 2013).

Grassroots practitioners might recognise some of the dilemmas discussed in this research, learn about the policy context in which youth work takes place, or be inspired by stories of passion and resistance. Managers who are committed to inclusive and participative processes might also find the research useful, and could encourage their teams to discuss and debate its findings and implications. Individuals and groups involved in the policy process could be interested in some aspects of the research, particularly if they are looking for evidence for the preservation of grassroots work, the valuing of grassroots perspectives, and the cutting back of bureaucracy. Activists are perhaps more likely than most policy makers to be in tune with the wider political orientations of this research, and might find it useful to think about the varying kinds of everyday resistance that workers are involved in. By suggesting the implications of this research here I am sharing my thoughts about what people in different positions might do towards the survival and re-imagining of grassroots youth work practice.

Implications for youth workers

If grassroots youth work is to survive, workers might celebrate and develop the disputatious traditions of youth work and avoid becoming technocrats who 'go along with' whatever they are asked to do. They might engage in everyday resistance in various forms including developing grounded discourses that focus on young people rather than targets and profit, refusing and rebelling when needed, and creative positive alternatives. Everyday resistance does not necessarily mean being seen as a persistent troublemaker (a role that may well be justified but is not the only option, nor perhaps always the most effective). It might be important to choose battles, to 'earn' the right to be heard by building a deserved reputation as an excellent youth worker, and (most of all) to build alliances and work collectively.

While there is much to critique in the current youth work context there is also much to celebrate, including youth workers' passion for their work and care for young people. Nobody feels constantly passionate or enjoys their work all of the time, but it is important to recognise that emotional engagement is intrinsic to the youth work role. Passion, care and love for youth work and young people are important; they also require their own energy and recovery time, and the building of support networks amongst colleagues. Passionate commitment does not imply the need to follow orders or sign up

to organisational priorities that do not place young people at the centre of practice; it can be harnessed instead for the development of enthusiastic and critical engagement within the field of youth work.

It is important to think about ways to reject the individualising tendencies and blame culture of the current policy context. Whether we are focused on our ongoing work with young people or trying to create new ways of working, we as practitioners should think about how to emphasise the collective and associational aspects of youth work. This might include bringing young people together in groups, supporting and encouraging each other, insisting on time and space for reflection and debate, building bottom-up networks of learning, meeting informally to discuss issues in the workplace, engaging in existing campaigns and groups, and working in solidarity with young people, activists, community groups, and practitioners in other settings.

Implications for managers and organisations

The most immediate way of improving the working life of grassroots workers would be for organisations to embed a deeper level of workplace participation: to invite *all* workers and volunteers to regular meetings and training, give them choices over how much or how little information they would like to receive, and create spaces for part-timers and volunteers to support each other, learn together, develop their own projects and share concerns and ideas. Grassroots workers' passion for youth work and young people must not be exploited. Paid part-timers should be rewarded for their work in line with nationally negotiated pay scales, should be paid to take part in planning and discussions as well as face-to-face work, and should be employed on longer term contracts where possible. Volunteers should not be asked to do more than they have time for, and all workers and volunteers need regular support, guidance, supervision and training.

Grassroots youth workers' priority is the young people they work with, rather than the organisational demands that managers are often preoccupied with. If they are *genuinely* involved in decision making they might ask difficult questions, and these need to be welcomed and taken seriously. Grassroots workers might question why managers (often the most experienced and most highly paid staff members) focus mainly on back-office

tasks, while part-timers and volunteers are left to do the complex work with young people. They are also likely to challenge the need to work towards targets and outcomes which are often obstructive of their relationships with young people.

Youth work organisations need to think about ways to do things differently and challenge the dominance of the business model. This can be supported through critical alliances:

> Instead of building networks with the world of business and transposing further elements of the economic field into the non-profit sector, or adapting existing welfare practices to the neoliberal order, non-profit social service agencies need to network with activists and agents less encumbered by state funding, forming micro-publics in which alternative visions of social service can form. (Woolford & Curran, 2013, p.60)

As long as managers are more highly valued by organisations than face-to-face workers, inequalities will persist. Managerial hierarchy (however democratically organised) cannot be justified as the 'only' possible structure for youth projects, particularly given that managers tend to be from more privileged social groupings than part-timers and volunteers. Flat structures which *demonstrate* (rather than only stating) that workers at all levels are valued will result in more inclusive, dynamic and effective working practices.

Implications for policy

At a time when open access and anti-oppressive youth work is under serious threat, that which remains relies heavily on volunteers, part-timers and workers on insecure contracts. It makes no sense that those working face-to-face with young people are the lowest paid, least rewarded and least listened to; that experienced and skilled face-to-face workers, when promoted, become too busy with administration to spend much of their time working directly with young people and less experienced colleagues; or that workers at all levels are overwhelmed with bureaucratic tasks that are damaging to relationships with young people. This situation points to an under-valuing of the skills and practice of working with people, an over-valuing of managerial tasks, and a neglect of the inherent importance of *informality* and *process* in youth work practice.

There is also a wider policy problem with the implication that only a full-time job is a

'proper' job; this norm is outdated and disadvantageous to women, carers and disabled people in particular. If working part-time was more fairly rewarded, paid work – as well as the necessary unpaid work of child-rearing, caring and housework – could be shared out more fairly and equally. This change is recommended by a recent report from the New Economics Foundation (2010, p.2):

> A 'normal' working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life.

Celebrating and valuing part-time work in the youth work field would require a steep reduction in bureaucracy and predefined outcomes. Youth work needs to be valued for what it is (as it is valued by young people themselves) rather than in comparison to more formal practices. Youth work's strength is in its ability to build trusting and open-ended relationships with young people. It is best supported by strong and democratic youth services, grant funding (rather than commissioning) for voluntary and community organisations, and investment in education, training and opportunities for mutual support and development. At a time when organisations are increasingly reliant on part-timers and volunteers, there is a strong argument for a review of the education, training and support available for part-time and volunteer youth workers.

Implications for activism and campaigning

Traditional industrial action (usually taking the form of strikes) continues to have its place, but it has only ever been one model of resistance. Grassroots workers are not disengaged or depoliticised; they are engaged in various forms of critique and resistance against the dominant models of market-oriented and managerialist youth work. Many could already be seen as experienced activists and do not need to be 'harnessed' or won over to a cause; they should be engaged with on an equal basis and involved in creating spaces for critical reflection, mutual support and action.

Workers' organisations and networks such as In Defence of Youth Work, Feminist Webs and the Federation for Detached Youth Work play an important role in providing some of these critical (and self-critical) spaces by organising in decentralised ways, online as well as through workshops, conferences, seminars and local forums. The role of the trade unions also remains important and perhaps under-utilised. These overtly

political networks and organisations contribute to a critical culture and activist spirit in youth work, particularly when they start from and take seriously grassroots workers' perspectives rather than 'recruiting' workers to an already-decided programme.

Campaign organisations might think – inclusively and collectively - about whether there is more they can do to support, encourage and collectivise the resistance already undertaken by grassroots youth workers in their everyday lives. It also makes sense for activists to build alliances beyond youth work with 'people who share our principles ... in all manner of places, within schooling, welfare, in the trade unions, in cooperatives and so on' (Taylor & Taylor, 2013). It is important to build alliances within local communities and with grassroots activist movements, taking inspiration from a variety of struggles and widening our sense of what political action might look like. This is not about throwing away traditional models; it is about working from the grassroots and being open minded about what workplace activism looks like.

Reclaiming and re-imagining grassroots youth work

The workers who took part in this research are committed to building relationships with young people on their own terms and to maintaining informal and person-centred approaches. They are defending youth work through their passionate practice as well as through diverse forms of everyday resistance. Their defence of youth work can be seen as a process that involves both reclaiming and re-imagining. There are many theories and practices from the past that are highly valued by youth workers, elements that have been struggled for by previous generations such as the voluntary principle, informal education and anti-oppressive youth work. When these are attacked they need to be defended and where they are lost they can be reclaimed. But it is not enough to simply recreate what we had in the past. Re-imagining is also necessary to challenge what we take for granted and try out new things; 'claiming a place is not merely about gaining access to what already exists, but rather about transforming place' (Athanasiou in Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p.24).

As I come to the end of writing this thesis I do not feel that the research is ‘finished’. I hope to bring together groups of grassroots practitioners to discuss and debate the

practical implications of this and other recent youth work research, and think about ways to support each other in everyday resistance against the dominant trends of policy. There would also be a value in bringing together alternative and radical youth work organisations that are 'swimming against the tide' of the marketised and managerial directions of policy. In research terms, I hope to revisit some areas that were present in the interviews and discussion groups and not explored in depth in this study. I would also like to follow up this project with further research, for example, around the role of alternative and radical youth work organisations, the growth in social enterprises and the private sector in youth and community work, the training and education of part-timers and volunteers, and the casualisation of youth work and other forms of education.

Grassroots youth work faces many challenges and it probably always will unless fundamental social inequalities are overturned. It is a practice that works with marginalised young people who are usually working-class and often black, and to some extent its workforce mirrors this demographic. It is hardly surprising, then, that youth work does not tend to occupy a powerful position in policy making. There is much to do if we are to continue to reclaim and re-imagine youth work for the future. Nevertheless, youth work is surviving in many places - even in these very challenging times - as a passionate, principled and reflective practice that values equality, freedom and collective life.

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